Death and Immortality in Late Neoplatonism

Studies on the Ancient Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo

SEBASTIAN RAMON PHILIPP GERTZ

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By
Sebastian Ramon Philipp Gertz

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A NOTE ON CITATIONS

References to the *Phaedo Commentaries* by Olympiodorus and Damascius follow the division of the text in Westerink's magisterial edition. They take the form Ol.1.2.3 (Olympiodorus: number of lecture, subdivision, line number) or Dam.I.272.4 (Damascius: set of lecture notes, number of scholion, line number). For shorter quotations, I include the Greek or Latin in the main text; otherwise, I generally confine myself to giving the key phrases in brackets. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

1. *Nature and Purpose of the Present Study*

The ancient commentaries on Plato's *Phaedo* offer a unique perspective on the study of Plato's dialogue in late antiquity. Were it not for them, we would know very little about how ancient readers approached the text. Moreover, they throw an interesting light on broader subjects: the understanding of the philosophical life in the final phase of Greek Neoplatonism, and the significance which the doctrine of immortality held for the last Platonist thinkers in the ancient world. Yet, surprisingly, these commentaries have not benefited much from the revival of interest in the Platonic tradition in recent years, despite their relative accessibility in a highly praised edition.[1] There are a number of possible reasons for this neglect. Their state of preservation does not encourage treating them as anything other than source material, and the loss of all prefatory material, which would have set out the general guidelines for interpretation, weighs heavily here. Of the commentaries by Olympiodorus and Damascius, furthermore, the one that is better preserved is, sadly, also the lesser in quality (Olympiodorus'); and while the sparse student notes taken from Damascius' lecture courses do contain hints of doctrinal innovations, they are all too often silent about the reasoning that led to them.

In this study, I hope to present and analyze the late Neoplatonic exegesis of Plato's *Phaedo* by focusing on the issues of death and immortality. Like Plato's Socrates, the Neoplatonists did not think that death was the end. They turned to Plato's dialogues (especially *Republic*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*) to find arguments that would suggest something of us survives, and survives everlastingly, the death of our bodies. This 'something' they identified with the rational human soul. But while it is one thing to know where an argument is supposed to lead, it is quite another to identify the relevant steps on the way, and to avoid the logical difficulties that critics of Plato in antiquity had not been slow to point out. One central part of my study, then, is to analyze the immortality arguments in the *Phaedo*

[1] Westerink (1976–1977).

with the help of the Neoplatonic commentators. To understand the commentators' perspective, it is first of all necessary to understand them as interpreting Plato's text, and making the best sense of it they could. I shall therefore have to devote some time to particular problems in Plato's arguments themselves, in order to explain how the commentators attempt to deliver answers. The results are not infrequently surprising, but, arguably, part of the interest in looking at ancient interpretations lies in detaching oneself from one's own cherished beliefs about the problems in an argument or a stretch of text, and seeing what sort of challenges a reader with different metaphysical and hermeneutical assumptions will face when reading a particular Platonic dialogue.[2]

Yet Plato's *Phaedo* is not about arguments alone. Any sympathetic reader of the dialogue will want to take into account, and take seriously, the 'non-dialectical' parts of it. By this I mean those parts that do not, ostensibly, provide *arguments* in favour of anything, such as the final myth, or that seem to be more concerned with the right way to pursue an ideal philosophic life than with giving rational justifications for the belief in immortality. Yet to divorce these parts from the rest of the dialogue would be a serious mistake, a mistake which the ancient commentators did not make. Having certain beliefs about death will also in one way or another entail certain beliefs about life. Therefore, the case for immortality is intimately tied up with two ethical questions: what is the right way for the philosopher to live and die, and what happens after death?

In chapter one of this study, I shall look at the ancient commentators' responses to Socrates' view that philosophy is a 'pursuit of death', and his prohibition of suicide. Olympiodorus admits that suicide is generally unlawful, but thinks it can be justified in special circumstances. Chapter two will outline how the commentators interpret Socrates' 'second defence' speech (*Phd.* 63b–69e), which describes the ideal philosopher's way of life, who is above all concerned with separating himself from the body and all that belongs to it. The *Phaedo*, as it turns out, is not only a dialogue *about* purification but also a dialogue *for* purification: the student who has read the 'political' dialogue *Gorgias* at the previous

[2] On some methodological considerations that must be taken into account when reading ancient commentaries, see the classic article by P. Hadot (1998), and more recently Hoffmann (2006). See also Annas (1999) for the relevance of ancient Platonism to modern Plato scholarship.

συνουσίαι is now being convinced by his teacher that the true philosopher has no business meddling in politics. This is not, to put it mildly, an obvious lesson from Socrates' speech, but its implications for the status of political engagement in Neoplatonism seem to me to be profound.

Chapters three to six make up the central part of this study; they are dedicated to the immortality arguments in the *Phaedo*. Socrates' 'dialectical' case for immortality can rightly be said to begin with the argument from opposites. Chapter three will focus on the intricate debate between Syrianus and Damascius on what the argument proves, and how it proves it. Both agree that the argument is about the dissociation and association of soul and body. They differ on how to understand this basic premise: is what is at stake the dissociation and association of two independent substances (Syrianus' view), or is the point rather that one substance can take on different accidents without perishing (Damascius')? Does the argument simply assume that soul is stronger than the body, or is the tacit premise of Socrates' demonstration that all substances *qua* substances are stronger than their accidents? Damascius settles for the latter option, and elevates it to the status of a general law of change that guarantees the eternity of the world of generation.

In chapter four, I shall discuss a closely connected argument in the *Phaedo*, the argument from recollection. If the argument from opposites proves that the soul survives the death of the body at least for some time, the argument from recollection, based on the famous Platonic doctrine that all learning is recollection of previous knowledge, suggests that souls pre-exist their entry into bodies. Proclus and Damascius try hard to defend this doctrine against rival theories that have soul come to be with its knowledge already present, whether in the form of instincts or natural principles. In a final section, I will consider how the commentators draw out the argument's implications for two broader epistemological questions, namely how memory and recollection are related, and whether animals are able to recollect.

The third argument for immortality in the *Phaedo*, which I discuss in chapter five, argues from soul's greater similarity to the intelligible realm that it is also more lasting than the body. Both Proclus and Damascius agree that the argument offers no more than the hope of limited survival after death, but they differ profoundly on the source of the argument's limitation. From Socrates' claim at *Phd*. 78c1–4 that what is composite is also perishable, Proclus and Damascius draw out an interesting *aporia*: does it not, by the same reasoning, follow that the universe that was bound together by the demiurge is perishable?

In chapter six, we reach the final argument for immortality that, in the dialogue, appears to bring to rest all doubts about soul's continued existence after death. For our commentators, only this final argument proves full immortality in the sense of unlimited survival after death. It had come under serious attack by Strato, whose objections feature prominently in the student notes from Damascius' course.[3] The most striking aspect of Damascius' defence of the final argument is that, paradoxically, he appears to undermine it. He admits that although soul can have an existence separate from the body, it may still become exhausted, since it has only a limited potency (δύναμις). A final string of eight dense arguments is designed to tie up loose ends and bring together the lessons learned from the dialectical encounter with Strato. Strangely, however, the finite potency objection remains unanswered, and we are left guessing how the problem would have been resolved by Damascius, if at all.

Why does Socrates not end with the final argument, but instead go on to give a mythical description of the 'true earth' and the various afterlife destinations of souls? Myths work on a number of different levels, and, as I will show in my final chapter, the Neoplatonic commentators were well aware of this fact. For them, myths, mysteries, symbols and sacred poetry will, if correctly interpreted, coincide with Platonic doctrines, but their *modus operandi* is different from rational demonstration. If souls, through their descent from true being, are themselves images in a way, it is through images that their dormant reason-principles are best activated. There is something special about *Platonic* myths, however: unlike, for example, Homeric myths, they do not require extensive reinterpretation by means of allegory, but can instead be taken as true descriptions of reality, while at the same time allowing for higher 'ethical' or 'hieratic' levels of meaning.

Before proceeding, I must signal some additions and omissions. This study is neither about the *Commentaries on the Phaedo* alone, nor about all of the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*. On the one hand, a whole tradition of interpretation stands behind the school teaching of Olympiodorus and Damascius. Firmly attested commentaries, whether on

[3] It was only in the final stages of preparing this manuscript for press that I have found out about Luciana Repici's chapter 'Strato's *Aporiai* on Plato's *Phaedo*', in M.-L. Desclos & W.W. Fortenbaugh (eds) (2010), *Strato of Lampsacus: Text, Translation, and Discussion*. *RUSCH XVI* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, N.J.).

the whole dialogue or parts thereof, include those by Harpocration,[4] Porphyry,[5] Iamblichus,[6] Paterius,[7] Plutarch of Athens,[8] Syrianus[9] and Proclus.[10] Albinus,[11] Atticus,[12] Democritus,[13] Theodorus,[14] Ammonius,[15] Simplicius[16] and Philoponus[17] all may have written commentaries on the *Phaedo*, but the evidence is mostly slim.[18]

Extensive discussion of individual problems and arguments in the *Phaedo* did not have to take the form of commentaries or monographs on specific topics in the dialogue. Alcinous *Didaskalikos* ch. 25 Louis summarizes Platonic immortality arguments, and reflects some aspects of Middle Platonic *Phaedo* exegesis. Plotinus *Enn*. IV.7 moves in a scholastic polemical context, but draws more original conclusions from the Platonic

[4] The fragments of Harpocration's *Phaedo Commentary* are collected and discussed by Gioè (2002), 438–444 and Dillon (1971), 129–139.

[5] See now fragments 179–180 in Smith's (1993) Teubner edition.

[6] Fragments from Iamblichus' *Phaedo Commentary* are collected in Dillon (1973), 85–89 (discussed at 239–244).

[7] Cf. Dam.I.2.3; 100.4; 137.5.11, and the discussion in Beutler (1943).

[8] Plutarch of Athens read Aristotle's *De anima* and the *Phaedo* with Proclus, who in turn gathered his notes into a commentary (Marinus *Vita Procl*. 12.9–15 Saffrey-Segonds). On Plutarch, see Beutler's *RE* article, cols. 962–975. Cf. also Dam.I.100.4; 177.5; 503.4.

[9] Although Suidas does not list a *Phaedo* commentary among Syrianus' writings, Seeck conjectures that the list may be selective and drawn up early in Syrianus' career. Cf. *RE* 'Syrianos', col. 1730. It is at any rate certain that Syrianus composed a treatise on the argument from opposites (cf. the telling disjunction Πρόκλος ἤτοι ὁ Συριανός at Ol.9.2.8; 9.5.1; 10.3.19, all with reference to the argument from opposites). On Syrianus in the *Phaedo Commentaries*, see also Westerink (1976), 17f.

[10] Cf. Proclus *In Remp*. II.178.5; Elias *Prol*. 2.20ff.

[11] Cf. Goeransson (1995), 68–71 for an argument that Albinus wrote a commentary on the *Phaedo*.

[12] Cf. Dam.I.100.3 and Westerink (1976), 10.

[13] A Platonist who is almost no more than a name to us; cf. Dam.I.503.3.

[14] For Theodorus' view on the nature of the true earth, cf. Dam.I.503.3.

[15] Ol.7.5.5; 10.7.9. See also Ol.8.17.6, commenting on *Phd*. 69d, for evidence that Ammonius composed a monograph defending Plato against the charge that he was a sceptic about the immortality of the soul, and also Ol.10.15.1–3 on *Phd*. 72d7. See Westerink (1976), 127 *ad loc*. for other references to Ammonius' monograph, and Rappe (1998) for Damascius' knowledge of scepticism.

[16] I. Hadot (1996), 6 n. 17 has recognized a possible reference to a *Phaedo Commentary* at Simplicius *In Ench*. 12.14 Duebner/I.354 Hadot, to be added to the one pointed out already by Westerink (1976), 20 (Simplicius *In de Cael*. 369.4–6). For the latter passage, see also the discussion in O'Brien (2007), 252–255.

[17] Cf. Philoponus *In an. post*. 215.3–5. The influence of Ammonius might be suspected here, however.

[18] See Westerink (1976), 7–20 for a full survey, together with Dörrie-Baltes (1993), Bausteine 78.1–11 and commentary.

immortality proofs (IV.7.43–14.14).[19] It is likely that Porphyry's *Against Boethus*, the main fragments of which derive from Eusebius *PE* XI.28 and pseudo-Simplicius *In de an*. 247.22, engaged in a similar project to Plotinus in *Enn*. IV.7, since the scope of the fragments includes Stoic as well as Peripatetic theories of the soul.[20] The main interest of what remains of the treatise lies in its discussion of the third argument in the *Phaedo* (see chapter five). Augustine's *De immortalitate animae* continues Neoplatonic thinking on immortality; demonstrably influenced by Plotinus' *Enneads*, it may also contain traces of Porphyry's *De regressu animae* and possibly his *Phaedo Commentary*.[21] The relics of Iamblichus' own *De anima* in Stobaeus are doxographical in nature, but contain relevant material on death (ch. 36 Dillon-Finamore), the afterlife (chs. 37–38), purification after death (chs. 39–40), the goal of purification (chs. 41–43), the extent of afterlife punishment and judgment (chs. 44–45), and souls' rewards in the beyond (chs. 47–53). Iamblichus' influence on the *Phaedo* commentators' conception of the afterlife is likely to have been profound, since he posited an ethereal region as place of judgment for the vehicles of souls (cf. ch. 38), a suggestion that is taken up in the exegesis of Plato's afterlife myths by Proclus and his followers (see chapter seven).[22] The definitive list of conclusive immortality arguments was drawn up in a monograph by Proclus, preserved in Priscian *sol. ad. Ch*. 47–49 Bywater and in the Arabic tradition: only the final argument of the *Phaedo*, the argument in *Republic* X and the demonstration of the *Phaedrus* prove full immortality.[23] I will draw freely on this rich background of texts where it will help our understanding of Olympiodorus' and Damascius' discussions.

I now come to the subject of omissions. I have not devoted a chapter to the refutation of the harmony theory (*Phd*. 85b–95e), because, not being a constructive argument, it falls outside the immediate focus of my study. By itself, the refutation of the harmony theory does not

[19] For a full commentary on Plotinus *Enn*. IV.7, see now Longo (2009).

[20] See Gottschalk (1986).

[21] Cf. Courcelle (1969), 189–190, and Wolfskeel (1997), 21–31. Both assume that Augustine read Porphyry's *De regressu* by the time he composed his *De immortalitate animae*, probably in 386 AD.

[22] Cf. Finamore (1998).

[23] See Westerink (1973) and Hasnawi (1997). The *Republic* argument is discussed more fully by Proclus himself at *In Remp*. I.89.6–92.13; Hermias *In Phdr*. 102.1–120.16 deals at length with that of the *Phaedrus*.

significantly advance the case for immortality; the real crux of this section of Damascius' commentary, as so often with the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, lies outside of mere textual exegesis. Its aim, according to Damascius, is to draw out an understanding of the soul as harmony that is compatible with the *Timaeus* and committed to the soul's incorporeal nature.[24] I have, furthermore, been largely silent on the question of reincarnation, which has been hotly debated among Neoplatonists, in contexts such as *Phd.* 81e–82c.[25] Apart from two occasions (on the argument from affinity and on the final myth), moreover, I shall have little to say about the pneumatic body or vehicle, but I should point out that Neoplatonic ideas about immortality will in one way or another include the vehicle, as either being of secondary importance in the ascent of the soul to the 'father Intellect' (Porphyry), or as a vital intermediary between man and the gods (Iamblichus).[26] Unless stated otherwise, however, 'immortality' in the following will mean 'immortality of the rational soul'.

I conclude this introduction with a brief presentation of Olympiodorus' and Damascius' different methods as commentators (section two) and some remarks on the interpretative goal of the dialogue (section three).

2. *Olympiodorus and Damascius: Two Philosophical Personalities*

The main aim of this introductory section is threefold: to give a sense of the distinctive working methods of our commentators; to discuss the different formal features of their texts; and to support with ample evidence some basic working principles (set out in italics) I shall employ in the remainder of this study.

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[24] According to the commentators, Socrates at *Phd.* 95a4–5 is referring to transcendent harmony (Harmonia) and the sublunary world as belonging to the domain of Dionysus (Cadmus) (cf. Dam.I.376–377). The goddess Harmonia represents the highest kind of harmony, while Socrates' arguments have refuted the lowest (material) kind (Dam.II.57). By this process of elimination, Socrates draws attention to the sense in which soul *is* a harmony, in an 'intermediate' sense (*sc.* mathematical, and so neither absolutely transcendent nor immanent in matter, neither Harmonia nor Cadmus), as we find it in the *Timaeus* (34b10–36d7). Cf. Iamblichus *De an.* fr. 5 Dillon-Finamore (I.364.16–365.24 Wachsmuth-Hense). See also the valuable discussion by Bechtle (2002).

[25] See Damascius' comments *ad loc.* (Dam.I.355).

[26] The key passage on the vehicle's immortality is Proclus *In Tim.* III.234.6–238.26. Appendix II in Dodds (1963) is still the best introduction to the subject.

2.1. *Olympiodorus*

The extant manuscripts of the *Commentaries on the Phaedo* by Olympiodorus and Damascius go back to one archetype, Marcianus gr. 196 Z. A first part of the manuscript contains a clearly structured commentary on the *Phaedo*, which a marginal note ascribes to Olympiodorus (the original title is not preserved): Ὀλυμπιοδώρου φιλοσόφου σχόλια εἰς τὸν Πλάτωνος Φαίδωνα. λείπει δὲ τούτοις τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς φύλλα ἕξ.[27] It covers *Phd.* 61c–79d and is divided into individual lectures (πράξεις), which are again subdivided into a general theoretical part (θεωρία) and a detailed discussion of small portions of text, usually individual words or phrases (the λέξις).[28] One πρᾶξις corresponds to one lecture; when Marinus praises Proclus' superhuman industry, he does not fail to mention that his master expounded five πράξεις in a single day, sometimes even more.[29] The division of lectures into θεωρία and λέξις already exists in some form in Proclus' own commentaries, but is used rather flexibly by the latter, as Festugière has shown with great effect.[30] Characteristic of Olympiodorus, on the other hand, are frequent repetitions due to his strict application of the θεωρία-λέξις format.

These facts, the fairly rigorous construction of his commentary and its slight repetitiveness, suggest that Olympiodorus is above all a good lecturer and teacher, eager to impress the key points of his lessons onto the minds of his listeners, and ready to simplify matters down to their essentials, lacking interest in either the complexity of Proclus or the subtlety of Damascius.[31] In the case of his *Alcibiades Commentary*, we can compare

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[27] Olympiodorus' other Platonic commentaries on *Alcibiades* and *Gorgias* add ἀπὸ φωνῆς ('from the oral teaching') to σχόλια, a fact which underlines the classroom origin of the commentaries. On the use of ἀπὸ φωνῆς, cf. Richard (1950).

[28] Cf. Norvin (1915), 19 n. 4 for references that would suggest the Neoplatonic use of πρᾶξις may have originated with the Alexandrian philologians. Beutler (1939), cols. 221–227 surveys Olympiodorus' use of the θεωρία-λέξις format in both his Aristotelian and Platonic commentaries.

[29] Cf. Marinus *Vita Procl.* 22.30–31 Saffrey-Segonds.

[30] See Festugière (1963).

[31] This has given rise to some unflattering evaluations, e.g. Lloyd's judgement that Olympiodorus' Platonic commentaries are 'merely second-hand and philosophically negligible'. Cf. Lloyd (1970), 317 and Beutler (1950). For some recent attempts to balance these harsh views, see Renaud (2008) and Tarrant (1997b). Olympiodorus' use of the phrase 'it is Platonic doctrine (δόγμα Πλατωνικόν) that …' could be seen as another example of a lecturer's concern to bring home key points to his audience. The phrase occurs already in Proclus, but not nearly as often: Proclus *In Tim.* III.261.16; but elsewhere only used more generally in the plural. Compare this to Olympiodorus *In Alc.* 89.19; 145.6; 213.8; *In Gorg.* 37.2.14; *In Phd.* 8.4.1; 13.2.31; 13.2.36; 13.9.2; 13.19.3.

Olympiodorus directly with Proclus, and notice a clear tendency to simplify and make more sparing use of the metaphysical speculations and correspondences that bloat Proclus' oeuvre.[32] On the other hand, there is little doubt that Olympiodorus relied on Proclus' commentaries for the basic structural points of interpretation and doctrine, rather than making extensive use of Damascius' commentaries, which depart from Proclus on many fundamental points, as we shall soon see. There are exceptions, to be sure: in his *Alcibiades Commentary*, Olympiodorus goes as far as to favour Damascius' definition of the dialogue's interpretative goal over Proclus'.[33] In the *Phaedo Commentary*, however, the following is generally true: *Olympiodorus does not take into account solutions proposed by Damascius*, with the exception of two occasions.[34] On the whole, then, Olympiodorus is likely to pass on Proclus' commentary in a simplified version, embellished with some citations from the 'Classics' of his days, occasionally expanded on some individual points, but on the whole true to the great Neoplatonic system-builder.[35] The extent to which Olympiodorus deviates from Proclus, or adheres to him, can in individual cases only be firmly decided by comparison with Damascius, who also takes Proclus' lost commentary as his point of departure (see below). To anticipate the main point, another general principle follows from an examination of Damascius: *Where a view which Damascius criticises corresponds to a view accepted by Olympiodorus, there is an overwhelming likelihood that it will be Proclus'*.

If the trend towards simplification is primarily due to Olympiodorus' style of teaching, however, his own interests and specialization may also come into play here (this is what I mean by 'philosophical personality'). It seems true, for instance, that some significance must attach to the fact that Olympiodorus commented almost exclusively on philosophically 'low-level' dialogues such as *Alcibiades*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*, unlike

[32] Festugière (1963) offers a comparison between Proclus' and Olympiodorus' treatments of the same passages in Plato's *Alcibiades*.

[33] Cf. Olympiodorus *In Alc.* 4.15–17: Ο δὲ Δαμάσκιος ἀκριβέστερον καὶ ἀληθέστερον παραδιδοὺς τὸν σκοπὸν οὐχ ἁπλῶς φησὶν αὐτὸν εἶναι περὶ τοῦ γνῶναι ἑαυτόν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ πολιτικῶς γνῶναι ἑαυτόν ('Yet Damascius, handing down the goal more accurately and truly, says that it is not simply about self-knowledge, but about *civic* self-knowledge.').

[34] Ol.4.10.1 ff.; 8.9.9.

[35] The influence of Ammonius, however, is a complicating factor that must also be taken into account, and may explain occasions where Olympiodorus diverges from Proclus and Damascius, as Westerink (1976), 19–20 points out.

Proclus, who ranged from the lowest (*Alcibiades* and *Phaedo*) to the highest extremes of the Iamblichean curriculum (*Timaeus* and *Parmenides*). In a classic article, Prächter sought to explain the differences between post-Iamblichean Neoplatonic commentators with reference to the main two schools of Neoplatonism, Athens and Alexandria.[36] The Alexandrian school, on this line of argument, would be characterized by an emphasis on Aristotelian commentary and a simplified metaphysical hierarchy, making it more compatible with a Christian audience. The Athenians, on the other hand, continued the Iamblichean tradition of Plato exegesis and showed greater interest in metaphysics and pagan theology.

Yet recent research on the supposed differences between Alexandrian and Athenian styles of exegesis has shown that there are no clear cut generic differences between the two schools, and Prächter himself had to acknowledge the close personal ties between the Athenian and Alexandrian schools.[37] A more promising way to explain the difference between individual commentators would be in terms of different abilities, interests and specializations. In the case of Olympiodorus, for example, his specialization may have been on the ethical aspects of the Neoplatonic curriculum, as something of an expert in 'Socratic matters', as Tarrant has suggested.[38] There is a sense—albeit limited—in which Olympiodorus inherits a degree of philosophical autonomy from his teacher Ammonius.[39] Despite being primarily an exegete, Olympiodorus considers it his task to search for the truth rather than letting himself be convinced by philosophical authority, be it as great as Socrates' or Plato's.[40] A certain independence of judgment may also come to the fore in his discussion

[36] See Prächter (1910). The problem of Alexandrian Neoplatonism has been revisited by I. Hadot (1978) in a seminal contribution (with largely negative conclusions), and continues to be widely discussed. In the case of the *Phaedo Commentaries*, the distinction between Alexandrian (Olympiodorus) and Athenian (Damascius) metaphysics and theology cannot be drawn with much conviction (although Ol.1.2.3 speaks about 'god', possibly in line with Ammonius' more relaxed stance towards Christianity; see Westerink (1976), 39 *ad loc.*). Damascius' most radical doctrinal innovations (such as the Ineffable) which would set him apart from the 'Alexandrians' are for the most part not pertinent to the dialogue, and therefore absent. On the relation between the two schools, see also the succinct sketch by Verrycken in Lohr (1994), V–VI.

[37] Prächter (1910), 111 f.

[38] Cf. Tarrant (1997b).

[39] This point has been well brought out by Renaud (2008).

[40] On the strength of such passages as *Alc.* 114e and *Phd.* 91c, quoted by Olympiodorus at *In Gorg.* 41.9.4–8 Westerink.

of suicide, where Olympiodorus reaches a conclusion that has no close parallel in either Ammonius, Proclus or Damascius (see next chapter).

There is, therefore, need for a balanced judgment. Olympiodorus is neither a slavish copyist of Proclus, nor is he particularly concerned to innovate or to voice any disagreements he may have with other Platonists, unlike Damascius, whom we will consider next.

2.2. *Damascius*

After Olympiodorus' commentary, Marcianus gr. 196 Z. contains two sets of notes from a commentary on the *Phaedo*, covering *Phd*. 61c9–118a17 and *Phd*. 69e6–118a17 respectively. The notes are numbered and generally begin with ὅτι or an interrogative. The manuscript gives no clue as to their author, who, therefore, had to be identified on philological grounds. Norvin thought the notes were similar enough to Olympiodorus' commentary and hence assigned them to him, while developing a complicated hypothesis why they took a different form from the more obviously structured commentary in the first part of the manuscript.[41] His solution was decisively rejected by Heiberg, Beutler and Westerink, and it is now agreed that the notes directly derive from courses given by Damascius.[42] In the *Parmenides Commentary* that has come down to us under Damascius' name, he begins by summarising the views of Proclus and frequently criticises and refines them. *Marker phrases that signal Damascius' own interventions are, among others*, κάλλιον δὲ κτλ., μήποτε δὲ κτλ., ἄμεινον δὲ κτλ., μᾶλλον δὲ κτλ. These same marker phrases recur frequently in the notes on the *Phaedo*. Since no other Neoplatonist author known to us adopts a similar method to Damascius in the *Parmenides Commentary*, i.e. starting with Proclus' commentary and then subtly refining it by means of critical remarks, the attribution of the *Phaedo* notes to Damascius is more than probable. Supporting considerations are, for instance, the fact that a distinctive doctrine ('the heavenly bodies have all five senses, not merely two') explicitly attributed to Damascius by Olympiodorus occurs in the notes;[43] that the redactor of the notes refers to a doctrine unlike anything we find in Proclus which 'his teacher' expounded in a *Timaeus Commentary* ('the dodecahedron is the progression of each

[41] Cf. the summary in Beutler (1939), col. 211–212.
[42] See Heiberg (1916); Beutler (1939) and Westerink (1959).
[43] Ol.4.10.1; cf. Dam.I.531.3 ff.

element towards the sphere'), and that can hence only derive from Damascius;[44] and that there are a large number of significant disagreements between the notes and positions endorsed by Olympiodorus.[45]

There is, in other words, compelling evidence to suggest that the notes go back to Damascius' courses and were written down by one of his students. If the authorship of the notes is beyond doubt, however, it is more difficult to see much else in them than a jumble of scattered observations and criticisms. One can illustrate this difficulty with reference to Damascius' criticisms of Proclus. For the sake of convenience, I shall class them into different groups, without suggesting that our commentator would have made similar distinctions. A first group concerns Proclus' perceived tendency to wander off-topic. Damascius impatiently shrugs aside Proclus' worries and solutions and instead focuses on the interpretative goal of the dialogue.[46] A second group of criticisms concerns occasions when Proclus presents interpretations that are not appropriate to the text for reasons not apparently linked to the dialogue's overarching interpretative goal, e.g. in cases where the meaning of a given passage is distorted, given an unduly complicated explanation, or one that is beside the point.[47] Another quite different class of disagreements is over theological matters, e.g. concerning the relationships between different triads and gods.[48] These differences of opinion seldom have any bearing on Plato's text, but one should not underestimate the significance these seemingly abstruse debates held for Neoplatonists, and I will give some more comments on Damascius' self-understanding as philosopher and worshipper of the traditional gods below. The fourth group of disagreements derives from Damascius' own philosophical theories, which occasionally clash with Proclus'. Examples for this are the question how many senses the heavenly bodies have;[49] whether the world is liable to be dissolved or not;[50] whether each way of life (ethical, civic, purificatory, contemplative) has a virtue peculiar to it, or whether virtues display the same formal characteristics

[44] Dam.II.132.4–5. Damascius' (early) *Timaeus Commentary* seems to have been the point of departure for many of his innovations, especially in physics and psychology.

[45] This is particularly apparent in the treatment of the argument from opposites; cf. Ol.9–10 with Dam.I.207–252 (discussed in chapter three).

[46] Dam.I.41.3–13; 70.4 f.; 100.6 ff.; 180.4 ff.; Dam.II.145.10 ff.

[47] Dam.I.28.3–4; 117.4–5; 135.4–8; 137.10; 538.3–4; Dam.II.38.5–7; 100.3–6.

[48] Dam.I.9.2–8.; 14.6–9; 319.3; 539.6–7.

[49] Dam.I.531.3–7.

[50] Dam.I.331.4–8; Dam.II.36.9–14.

across all levels;[51] and the roles which appetite and memory play in intellect.[52] A fifth group of differences between our two philosophers could be described as dialectical: Damascius discovers logical shortcomings in Proclus' arguments, and presents subtler and usually more compelling solutions.[53] I believe that these five different classes cover the majority of disagreements between our commentators, although one should bear in mind that the motivation behind individual criticisms is sometimes difficult to reconstruct, partly owing to the extremely concise format in which the redactor has preserved them.

On the face of it, there is little hope of distilling a unified agenda from this list; I shall confine myself to noting some general tendencies. From his rhetorical training in Alexandria, Damascius seems to have acquired the art of reading texts closely; his own interpretations tend to stay closer to the details of the *Phaedo* than those of Proclus.[54] A second aspect of Damascius' 'philosophical personality' is the dialectician: he is quick to see through weaknesses in the arguments by Syrianus and Proclus, and gives more economical solutions, which may also stay closer to the details of a particular passage. Lastly, there is Damascius the theologian, perhaps the least well known or appreciated aspect of his activity as a commentator. And yet, we have an important programmatic statement at Dam.I.172, where our commentator presents himself as a harmonizer of two different tendencies within Neoplatonism. One group, represented by Porphyry, Plotinus and others, prefers philosophy; a second, represented by Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and 'all the rest of the ἱερατικοί', prefers the hieratic art, i.e. theurgy. Damascius goes on to give Plato's view, with which he clearly identifies himself: by calling the philosopher a divine name, that of 'Bacchus', Plato hints that we can identify the philosopher and the theurgist, if we posit the man who has

[51] Dam.I.149.7–12; 152.4–6.

[52] On Damascius' doctrine that the appetitive and cognitive aspects of intellect (virtue and knowledge) perfect each other, see Dam.I.31.4–7 and Westerink's comments *ad loc*. For the denial of memory in intellect, see Dam.I.257.10–11.

[53] Dam.I.297.5; 311.5–12; 337.3–4; 338.3–8; 368.12–17; 380.6–10; 547.5–8; Dam.II. 43.3–7; 56.7–9.12–16; 78.17–27; 147.5–12.

[54] See Photius *Bibl*. cod. 181.126b.40ff. Henry for Damascius' education. Westerink (1971), 257, writes: 'Si, néanmoins, on réussit à découvrir dans les observations de Damascius une portée générale, c'est dans le sens inattendu d'une interprétation plus pragmatique. Damascius a la réputation d'un mystique, voire d'un bigot; or, ce qui frappe dans ses commentaires, c'est l'intérêt qu'il prend au plan littéraire et à la situation concrète du dialogue'. Cf. also Van Riel, Macé and Follon (2008), CLXXIII–CLXXVI, for a similar conclusion with respect to Damascius' *Philebus* interpretation.

separated himself from the world of generation as an intermediary between the two. Interestingly, Dam.I.172 concludes with a twist: while philosophy and theurgy are importantly related and can be united into a single truth, Plato honours the philosopher with the name 'Bacchus', just as he calls *nous* 'God' or light that can be spoken about 'ineffable light'. Damascius' preference, therefore, seems to lie with the language of the theurgists, presumably out of a sense of philosophical piety. This general preference for 'hieratic' terminology, and the conviction that philosophy can be described perfectly in theurgic terms may go some way towards explaining Damascius' scrupulousness with regard to theological matters, although it is hardly peculiar to himself.

3. *Interpreting the* Phaedo*: The Centrality of the Σκοπός*

I conclude this introduction with a survey of some issues surrounding the 'interpretative goal' or σκοπός of Plato's *Phaedo*. The prefatory material to both Olympiodorus' and Damascius' *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, which would have discussed the dialogue's goal in some detail, is irretrievably lost. Our main evidence will therefore have to come, firstly, from a roughly contemporary source, the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, and, secondly, from the commentaries themselves.

3.1. *Finding the Σκοπός*

Plato's *Phaedo* was widely known and referred to as 'On the soul' in antiquity.[55] The use of double titles—the first drawn from either the name of a leading character or the occasion of the discussion or its guiding theme (e.g. *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Republic*), the second from its actual or purported subject matter—goes back at least to Thrasyllus, who placed the *Phaedo* at the head of a tetralogy comprising *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*.[56] Thrasyllus' canon and his tetralogies were known to the author of the *Anonymous Prolegomena*, who probably belongs to the circle of 6th century AD Alexandrian Neoplatonists known as 'the school of Olympiodorus'.[57] The anonymous author explicitly rejects the tetralogical

[55] Cf. e.g. Plato *Epist.* XIII.363a7; Callimachus *Ep.* 23.4; Diogenes Laertius *Vit. Phil.* 2.65.11; 3.55.7; 3.58.5; Plutarch *cons. ad Apoll.*120d9; *De an. procr.* 1013d4f.; Sextus Emp. *adv. math.*10.302.3.

[56] See Diogenes Laertius *Vit. phil.* 3.57.9–58.5 and Albinus *Isag.* 4.5–12 Hermann.

[57] While there is no compelling doctrinal and biographical evidence for a 'school of

ordering of the dialogues, partly with reference to the *Phaedo*. Thrasyllus' order rests on dramatic grounds and forms a narrative sequence: first Socrates is awaiting his own trial (*Euthyphro*); then he is in the process of being tried (*Apology*); then he is tried (*Crito*); and finally, he is dying as a consequence of the trial (*Phaedo*).[58] But, objects the anonymous author, Plato had no intention of imitating the tragedians, whom he, Plato, criticises for describing mere 'images of images' (εἴδωλα εἰδώλων; Anonymus *De phil. Pl.* 25.23). In addition, the tragedians' tetralogies end with a pleasant subject, while Plato's *Phaedo* describes the death of Socrates (ibid. 25.26). Finally, each of the dialogues in the first tetralogy has a different σκοπός, a consideration that our Anonymus seems to think will undercut Thrasyllus' grouping altogether (ibid. 25.27–29).

If the dramatic ordering found little favour with the author of the *Anonymous Prolegomena*, we should consider the reasons he gives us for thinking that the *Phaedo* has one single goal, rather than many. Why, after all, should anyone seek a unified strategy for the *Phaedo* that carries through the entire dialogue? How do topics as different as the immortality of the soul, the death of the wise man, and the philosophical life contribute towards one single purpose? The intriguing answer given by our Anonymus is worth quoting in full:

> [Plato himself says that] the dialogue is like a living being, because it is also a discourse; for any well-written discourse corresponds to a living being (πᾶς γὰρ λόγος ἄριστα γεγραμμένος ζῴῳ ἀναλογεῖ); if, then, the dialogue corresponds to a living being, and a living being has only one purpose, namely the Good (for the sake of which it has come to be), the dialogue ought to have one purpose also, that is, one goal (σκοπός). So we cannot agree with those who say that the *Phaedo* has three goals (τοὺς λέγοντας τρεῖς εἶναι τοὺς σκοποὺς τοῦ Φαίδωνος), the immortality of the soul, the death of the wise, and the philosophical life (περὶ ἀθανασίας ψυχῆς καὶ περὶ εὐθανασίας καὶ περὶ φιλοσόφου βίου); this view, as we said, is wrong, since there should not be many goals, but one only.
>
> (Anonymus *De phil. Pl.* 21.21–28 Westerink)

Olympiodorus', it is certain that several of the works which the manuscript tradition associates with the names 'Elias' and 'David' depend heavily on Olympiodorus, as already noted by their editor, Adolf Busse. See David *Prol.* 16.3; 31.34; 64.32 for three direct references to Olympiodorus. See also Vancourt (1941), 7–16, who argues convincingly that the works by Olympiodorus, Elias and David can be grouped together on account of their shared formal characteristics. Westerink (1990), LXXVI–LXXXIX gives a broad overview of parallels between the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* and other authors, as well as some considerations that go against attributing their authorship directly to Olympiodorus (LXXXVII–LXXXIX).

[58] Cf. Anonymus *De phil. Pl.* 25.10–16; Albinus *Isag.* 4.5–12 Hermann.

The inspiration for this passage comes from Plato's *Phaedrus*, where the analogy between a discourse and a living being is explicitly made.[59] Most relevant to our purposes in the passage quoted above is the view that the *Phaedo* has three goals. From the way it is described, the anonymous author seems to refer to some Platonists who held that view (cf. τοὺς λέγοντας above). I suggest that we have here a thinly veiled polemic against the Platonist Albinus, who makes the following remarks about the *Phaedo* in his *Prologos*:[60]

> He who is well equipped regarding his natural ability (κατὰ φύσιν εὖ πεφυκώς) […], he may begin with the *Alcibiades*, in order to return and turn back onto himself, and to grasp what it is he has to take care of (γνῶναι οὗ δεῖ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιεῖσθαι). And since it is beautiful to see by way of a model (ὥσπερ πρὸς παράδειγμα) who the philosopher is, and what his practice, and under what kind of assumption he expounds his teaching (τίς ἐστιν ὁ φιλόσοφος καὶ τίς αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐπιτήδευσις καὶ ἐπὶ ποίᾳ ὑποθέσει ὁ παῤ αὐτῷ λόγος προσάγεται), he should next study the *Phaedo*.
>
> (*Isag.* 5.11–22)

Since Albinus does not tell us how the three things we can learn from the *Phaedo* (the definition of the philosopher, his practice, and the assumption underlying his teaching) relate to each other, it would seem natural enough to regard them as distinct. If we equate, furthermore, the *Prologos*' question 'who is the philosopher?' with 'the philosophical life' of the *Prolegomena*; 'the philosopher's practice' (ἐπιτήδευσις; a verbal echo of *Phd.* 64a6) with εὐθανασία (presumably in the sense of Socrates' claim that philosophy is a 'practice of death'), an interesting correspondence between Albinus' justification for the sequence *Alcibiades-Phaedo* and the critique of the *Prolegomena* would emerge. The third item in Albinus' list, 'the kind of assumption that underlies the philosopher's teaching', calls to mind the method of hypothesis as outlined by Socrates at *Phd.* 100a–101d, but could conceivably also be seen to refer to the assumption of the soul's immortality that underlies Socrates' defence of the philosopher's way of life. If one admits the latter reading, Albinus' remarks would be a close match for the 'three-goals' theory critized by the anonymous author of the *Prolegomena*.

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[59] Cf. *Phdr.* 264c2–5 and Hermias' comments on the passage: *In Phdr.* 231.6ff.

[60] Albinus is to be credited with reforming the reading order on the basis of a 'progression towards wisdom'. Cf. *Isag.* 4.16f. (βουλόμεθα δὲ ἀρχὴν καὶ διάταξιν διδασκαλίας τῆς κατὰ σοφίαν εὑρεῖν) for the general principle.

Given, however, that a single Platonic dialogue can only have one interpretative goal, what is the right method for finding it, and what does this tell us about the *Phaedo*'s σκοπός? Again, the *Anonymous Prolegomena* are a helpful source, as they give us a list of ten rules for determining the goal of any given dialogue.[61] One of them, the 'one-goal' criterion (i), we have already discussed; it remains to consider the remaining nine. (ii) One must choose the most universal and comprehensive σκοπός, not the more particular.[62] (iii) The goal has to cover the entire dialogue, not merely a part thereof. (iv) An exact goal is preferable to an approximate one. (v) The greater and more admirable goal is preferable to one that is inferior. (vi) The goal should accord with what is said in the dialogue rather than being in disagreement with it. (vii) The goal of a dialogue cannot consist in contradicting someone. (viii) It cannot involve passion. (ix) The goal cannot be an 'instrument', like the art of division in the *Sophist*, but it should be an end. (x) The goal of a dialogue cannot derive from its matter, i.e. the characters in it.[63]

The best evidence for the *Phaedo*'s σκοπός comes from discussions of the Iamblichean reading order of the dialogues: Olympiodorus *In Gorg.* 0.6.12–15 tells us that the *Phaedo* comes after the *Gorgias* because it deals with the purificatory virtues, while the *Gorgias* deals with the civic virtues. The *Anonymous Prolegomena* 26.26 f., furthermore, argue that the *Phaedo* should be read after the *Gorgias* 'since it is concerned with purification, for after the civic life comes that of purification' (ὡς καθαρτικόν [ὄντα], μετὰ γὰρ τὴν πολιτικὴν ζωὴν ἡ καθαρτικὴ ἐστιν). We cannot arrive at the precise formulation of the *Phaedo*'s goal by conjecture alone, however. Olympiodorus *In Gorg.* 0.4.17–20 defines the goal of the *Gorgias*, for instance, with the cumbersome 'on the ethical principles that

[61] Anonymus *De phil. Pl.* 21–23. Parts of that list (or indeed its entirety) may go back to Iamblichus, who is also responsible for promoting the technical sense of σκοπός. See Dalsgaard Larsen (1972), 438–442 for detailed discussion.

[62] There is, therefore, an additional reason for rejecting Thrasyllus' double titles: if one of them is more universal, this alone is the real title; if both come down to the same, one of them is redundant; if they are different from each other, they cannot be accepted, since a work can only have one true aim (and so only one real title). Cf. Anonymus *De phil. Pl.* 21.35–41.

[63] Note here, incidentally, that tensions might come to light between the different criteria. On the one hand, the (metaphysically) greatest and highest goal is the most appropriate (v); on the other, the goal cannot be in disagreement with what is said in the dialogue (vi), limiting the scope for ambitious interpretations. The goal has to cover the entire dialogue (iii), but should, at the same time, be specific enough to reveal the philosophical point of a dialogue (iv).

lead to civic happiness' (περὶ τῶν ἀρχῶν τῶν ἠθικῶν τῶν φερουσῶν ἐπὶ τὴν πολιτικὴν εὐδαιμονίαν), rather than, say, 'on the civic virtues' (περὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν ἀρετῶν). There is, nonetheless, much to be said for Westerink's suggestion, that the definition of the interpretative goal would have been something like 'on the life of purification' (περὶ τῆς καθαρτικῆς ζωῆς), a notion that is prominent throughout the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*.[64]

It may come as a surprise to find that no mention has so far been made of the other obvious contender for the goal of the *Phaedo*: the immortality of the soul.[65] Why is the definition of the goal as 'on the life of purification' preferable to 'on the immortality of the soul'? One reason lies in the Iamblichean canon, which is structured according to a theory of spiritual progress: the student of philosophy is to be led from an understanding of the self as a soul using the body as an instrument (*Alcibiades*), to an insight into the nature of justice and the civic virtues (*Gorgias*), to be finally purified from political life with its inclusion of irrational impulses and activity in the merely contingent (*Phaedo*). Thus, rather than teaching a specific doctrine, that the soul is immortal, the *Phaedo* has a more 'universal' aim, namely to promote a particular way of life and to guide the student over the threshold to becoming a philosopher. Moreover, 'purification' has a better claim to covering the whole dialogue: the discussion of immortality is preceded by a long discussion of purification, and it is succeeded by a mythical account of souls' afterlife rewards and chastisements wherein the idea of purification plays an important role (*Phd.* 113d7; 114c1 ff.).

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[64] Cf. e.g. Ol.1.2.9; 1.13.11; 2.8.6; 7.9.2; 8.1.2; 8.18.4; Dam.I.121.3; 164.3; 174.5; 176.1.11; 252.2. Dam.I.67 distinguishes three degrees of the life of purification, in accordance with the Neoplatonic theory of procession, remaining and return. See also Westerink (1976), 28. Still valuable are the comments by Norvin (1915), 256ff.

[65] Dalsgaard Larsen (1972), 349–351 suggests that Iamblichus considered the σκοπός of the *Phaedo* to be 'on the immortality of the soul'. This suggestion is appealing, in so far as Iamblichus went to great lengths to prove that each argument in the *Phaedo* is a complete proof of immortality. If he had indeed defined the dialogue's interpretative goal as 'on the immortality of the soul', it could be expected that he would have reached for the most ambitious reading of each argument. There is a strong possibility, however, that Anonymus *De phil. Plat.* 26.18–27 continues to report the innovations that Iamblichus brought to the Platonic curriculum. The passage states that the *Phaedo* should be read after the *Gorgias* on the grounds that the purificatory life should follow the political life. If this was Iamblichus' view, he seems to have thought that the notion of 'purification' is central to the dialogue, not 'immortality' as such.

I shall have more to say about the relation between purification and immortality in the next section, which takes a closer look at how the commentators' definition of the *Phaedo*'s goal in terms of 'the life of purification' influences their way of interpreting the dramatic framework of the dialogue. For now, we can hold on to the modest conclusion that the author of the *Anonymous Prolegomena* rejects both Thrasyllus' and Albinus' attempts to integrate the *Phaedo* into a Platonic school curriculum, and prefers instead the arrangement that was probably established by Iamblichus.

3.2. *Applying the Σκοπός*

In this final section of the introduction, then, we will consider how the theory of a central, universal and unitary interpretative 'goal' shapes the interpretation of Plato's *Phaedo*. This will be a useful point of reference for later chapters in this study.

One aspect which Proclus would almost certainly have discussed in the lost prologue to his *Commentary on the Phaedo* is the allegorical significance of the individual characters in the dialogue. Platonic dialogues become miniature spiritual dramas working across different metaphysical levels when interpreted in Neoplatonic terms. A case in point is Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*, where even the seemingly innocuous smiles of Zeno and Parmenides can give rise to lengthy metaphysical disquisitions on the benevolent nature of divine causes.[66] Since Neoplatonic pedagogy works according to specific rules, however, one should not expect the allegorical interpretation of dramatic characters to go far beyond the σκοπός of a particular dialogue. The characters in the *Phaedo*, according to our commentators, stand in a hierarchical relationship: the central passage on this point is Ol.2.8.5–10, commenting on the interruption by the jailor (represented here as the analogue of a matter-bound daemon):[67]

> Here Socrates corresponds (ἀναλογεῖ) to the intellective and purificatory way of life, Crito to the secondary life that depends on it, and the man who is preparing the poison to the cause of destruction which has command over matter and also oversees privation. For this reason, the man who is preparing the poison does not address Socrates directly, so that the discourse shows that the lowest orders of existence (τὰ ἔσχατα) do not have direct contact with the highest.

[66] Cf. Proclus' comments on *Parm.* 136d (*In Parm.* 1022.1 ff.).

[67] Cf. Dam.I.46–47, where Socrates' attitude towards the jailor is held up as an example of non-resistance against matter-bound demons.

The relation between Socrates and his main interlocutors, Cebes and Simmias, would most likely have been explained in allegorical terms, too. At Ol.2.2.3–4, Simmias is clearly described as inferior to Cebes: the latter starts his discussion directly from Socrates' words, while Simmias himself depends on Cebes' cues. Simmias' humble place is emphasized again at Ol.8.11, where Socrates is described as leading Simmias up to the level of civic virtues.[68] By implication, then, Simmias would be below that level at the beginning of the dialogue, and gradually rise above it in the course of the discussion.

The few other remaining traces of character allegory preserved in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo* are for the most part banal, with one important exception. Both Olympiodorus and Damascius divide the dialogue into three parts: first the discussion of suicide and purification, second the arguments for immortality, third the final myth. When Damascius explains the transition from the first to the second part, he uses the intellectual inferiority of Cebes to Socrates as a reason why the discussion about purification turns to immortality. The whole passage is interesting enough to quote in full here:

> Socrates had kept together the purificatory life and the immortal life in a single thought (ἐν μιᾷ νοήσει); for the two are convertible (ἀντιστρέφει), as Aristotle too admits.[69] In general (καὶ ὅλως), whatever becomes more perfect when it is being separated cannot have an inseparable essence, because in that case it would become less perfect when it is separated. And what is more, if the soul can perfect itself with regard to its activity (κατὰ ἐνέργειαν), so much more does it strengthen itself with regard to its essence (κατὰ οὐσίαν) and revert upon itself, making itself substance (ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς ἑαυτὴν οὐσιοῦσα ἑαυτήν), such that, as master over its own being, it could not be destroyed by anything other than itself nor become worse unless through its own fault; no form naturally destroys itself, but it can only become like to what is inferior, and in this way become worse in its outward projection (προβολή).[70] In this way, Socrates had

[68] Ol.8.11.1–2: προσφόρως νῦν τὸ ὦ μακάριε, διότι ἀνάγει ἐπὶ μείζους ἀρετάς, τὰς πολιτικάς, αἷς οἰκεῖον τὸ μακαριστόν ('Here, he aptly says "my blessed [Simmias]", because he is leading him up to the higher virtues, i.e. the civic ones, to which "blessedness" is proper').

[69] For Damascius, Aristotle makes the same point that the detached and the immortal life are convertible at *De an.* III.5.430a22–23, where he points out that the active intellect alone is immortal and everlasting 'when separated it is only what it is'. Cf. also Philoponus *In de an.* 10.10 ff. for a densely argued case that Aristotle held the soul to be separable and immortal.

[70] προβολή: the Neoplatonists' term of choice for the activity of *phantasia*, as the texts

> brought together the single truth; but Cebes breaks it up and demands that immortality should be demonstrated separately as if it were a hypothesis for the demonstration of the purificatory life. (Dam.I.176)

The allegorical relation between Socrates and Cebes, unified higher truth and dialectically separated demonstration, throws an interesting light on how the *Phaedo*'s immortality arguments would have been integrated into the general agenda of 'purification'. The opening demonstration in the passage quoted (introduced with καὶ ὅλως) functions as a *reductio* argument: what is perfected in being separated must also have a separable essence; if not the latter, separation would be imperfection, contradicting the initial assumption. Damascius does not tell us why we should assent to the idea that soul is perfected in being separate, but we can infer from the following that he is dependent on Proclus' teaching on soul as 'self-constituted' (αὐθυπόστατον). The remark that 'soul reverts upon itself making itself substance'[71] (ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς ἑαυτὴν οὐσιοῦσα ἑαυτήν) in particular echoes Proclus' technical treatment of soul at *ET* props. 15–16; 44; 83; 186–187.[72] Briefly, the argument holds that souls, since they are capable of knowing the forms, must also know themselves, since they are inferior to forms.[73] But self-knowledge is tantamount to 'self-reversion', which is something no body is capable of. Therefore, souls that are capable of knowing themselves have an activity separate from the body. From activities, we infer essences; therefore the essence of soul is incorporeal, and therefore it is imperishable, and so immortal.

The relationship between Socrates and Cebes, then, has provided an example of how character allegory and dramatic logic can be used to great philosophical effect in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*. Although it might appear to the reader *as if* the part of the *Phaedo* dealing with immortality is designed to elucidate an assumption tacitly made in the first part, from a higher philosophical vantage point the two parts coalesce into a single truth and mutually support each other.

It remains to consider, in the remainder of this introduction, to what extent we can reconstruct the main lines of the Neoplatonic

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collected in Sorabji (2005a), 69–70 show. In our passage, it seems to refer more generally to any sort of activity directed towards the exterior.

[71] I am grateful to the anonymous reader of my draft manuscript for suggesting this translation of οὐσιοῦσα ἑαυτήν.

[72] See also Steel (2006), 242–243 and Whittaker (1975).

[73] I append a fuller discussion of Proclus' immortality argument in the *Elements of Theology* at the end of chapter seven.

interpretation of *Phd.* 57a1–61c9. Both Olympiodorus' and Damascius' commentaries begin with the discussion of suicide, but there is every reason to think that their common source (i.e. Proclus) would have had much of interest to say on the setting of the dialogue, the opening conversation between Echecrates and Phaedo, and Socrates' first discussion in prison.[74] Although the following is inevitably a somewhat speculative reconstruction, I believe that it is helpful in thinking about the kinds of philosophical issues Neoplatonic commentators would have picked out from the opening of the *Phaedo*.

The *Phaedo*, then, begins with a conversation between Echecrates and Phaedo.[75] Phaedo explains that Socrates' execution was delayed because of an Athenian custom to keep the city 'pure' while a special mission is sent to the Delos of Apollo (*Phd.* 58a–c). While much of the prologue may be concerned with giving a quasi-historical framework for the death of Socrates, it is hard to maintain that the reference to purity and the Delian Apollo occurs at the beginning of the dialogue as a matter of chance. Neoplatonic commentators, usually very sensitive to Plato's craftsmanship in designing the set-up for a particular dialogue, would most probably have expanded on the meaning behind the mission to Delos. While the special relation of Socrates to Apollo is stressed in a number of significant passages throughout the Platonic corpus, the link between purification and Apollo that we might see as being intimated in the prologue deserves special attention.[76] A passage from Damascius' *Phaedo Commentary*, for instance, explains a later reference to Apollo in the *Phaedo* (85b4–5) in the following terms:

> Being an Apollonian man by virtue of his purificatory way of life (κατὰ τὴν καθαρτικὴν ζωὴν), Socrates justly calls himself a 'fellow servant of the swans'; but also as a musician and as a healer of souls. (Dam.I.360)

The *Anonymous Prolegomena* provide us with some further evidence for the link between purification and Apollo. Consider the following passage,

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[74] For the principle that the introductory material of a Platonic dialogue is consistent with its interpretative goal, see, for example, Proclus *In Alc.* 18.15 ff. Dillon (1999) gives a wider survey of how Neoplatonists approached Plato's *prooimia*.

[75] It is likely that the fact that Socrates' words are reported in a frame narrative (the conversation between Echecrates and Phaedo) would have been interpreted allegorically, according to a schema set out to apply generally to all Platonic dialogues by the *Anonymous Prolegomena* 20. Cf. the valuable discussion in Nuesser (1991), 204–209.

[76] See for example *Apology* 21a for the link between Socrates and Apollo.

which follows the anonymous author's interpretation of Plato's (pseudo-biographical) dream of the swan which no fowler can catch:

> And not only do these dreams prove that he [*sc*. Plato] was an Apollonian man, but also his way of life, which was a way of life of purification: for such is the God himself, as his very name shows: for Apollo means 'he who is severed from plurality': the prefix having a privative meaning. We have another indication that he was an Apollonian man in the time of his birth: he was born on Thargelion 7th, on which day the isle of Delos celebrates the feast of Apollo.
>
> (Anonymus *De phil. Pl.* 1.38–44; tr. Westerink, slightly modified)

Admittedly, these two pieces of evidence may not directly derive from Proclus' lost commentary, but they nonetheless throw light on the possible significance of the 'Apollonian' references in the framework narrative, first and foremost in the mission to Delos.[77]

Phaedo's second speech in the prologue, at 58e–59b, describes his own emotional state, as well as that of his friends (59a8 ff.), in the presence of the fated Socrates. There is little by way of evidence to reconstruct what kind of considerations the Neoplatonic interpretation of this passage would have included. It is likely that Socrates' noble bearing in the face of death would have been explained in terms of its ethical significance, as a model to be imitated by aspiring philosophers.[78] The emotional state described in the passage, with its mixture of pleasure and pain (59a), laughing and crying, however, may have acquired a significance of its own, especially if read as anticipating Socrates' later reflections at 60b–c on the nature of pleasure and pain. An off-hand remark by Simplicius in his *Commentary on the Manual of Epictetus*, for instance, illustrates the claim that damage to the body, though it may impede the activities of the rational soul using the body as instrument, cannot *harm* the soul: 'as the divine Socrates said, the pain stays in the leg' (38.15 Dübner; cf. *Phd*. 60c6).[79] Damascius, in his *Commentary on the Phaedo*, similarly claims that 'only the man whose aim is purification is free from pleasure [*sc*. in opposition to the common man, the moral person and

[77] Cf. Proclus *In Crat*. 176 on the varieties and extent of Apollo's purificatory activities. According to Proclus *In Alc*. 5.10, Apollo governs the life of purification.

[78] Porphyry's interpretation of the introductory material of Plato's *Timaeus* in terms of virtues and 'duties' (καθήκοντα) suggests itself as a point of reference here; cf. e.g. Proclus *In Tim*. I.19.1–9; 24–27.

[79] Simplicius' view stands in interesting contrast with Olympiodorus', who takes the view that under certain circumstances the body may actually harm the soul, thus providing a rationale for suicide.

the statesman]: he is aware of pleasure in the same way as Socrates felt the pain in his leg' (Dam.I.161.4–6). The similarity between Simplicius' and Damascius' comments shows that Socrates' remarks on the nature of pleasure at *Phd.* 60b1–c7 were taken as philosophically serious.[80] A passage in Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Gorgias*, finally, discusses the question whether pleasure and pain are direct opposites, as the *Phaedo* would appear to claim. Olympiodorus rejects this interpretation, arguing that Socrates merely claims that the two 'seem' to be opposites—in fact, however, they are *routes* to opposites (i.e. to opposite states, according to and opposed to nature), rather than being opposites themselves (*In Gorg.* 31.3).

Little light can be shed on the significance of Phaedo's list of individuals present at Socrates' death. To the best of my knowledge, the famous mention of Plato as absent because of illness receives no treatment elsewhere among the commentators.[81] The only evidence for this part of the prologue comes from Proclus *In Tim.* I.23.4–11: the father of Critoboulos is not mentioned by name (59b) because Plato signifies 'indeterminateness and lack of a determined character' by lack of names, demonstrating that even minor characters could have assumed metaphysical significance.

Of substantially more interest is the initial scene of Socrates in prison awaiting his execution. We have already seen that the discussion of pleasure and pain appears to have had some interest to the commentators. Socrates' dismissive attitude towards his grieving wife Xanthippe (*Phd.* 60a), moreover, functions as a model for behaviour towards the 'inferior':

> But others liken courage to the purificatory way of life because of its unrelenting attitude towards inferior things; for such is courage, firm towards inferior things; in this way, too, Socrates is not swayed by Xanthippe and his crying child, but remains unmoved by them. (Ol.8.1.7–11)

Behind this passage stands a complex theory. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter two, Neoplatonists from Plotinus onwards distinguished several levels of virtues. The same virtue, for instance courage, can appear on different levels, but designates a very different kind of attitude or behaviour at each particular level. On the purificatory level of virtue, courage thus means resistance against what is inferior, wisdom the activ-

[80] According to Dillon (on Proclus *In Parm.* 741), *Phd.* 60b would have taken on a more metaphysical significance, as demonstrating that 'contraries everywhere depend from a single summit'.

[81] On illness as an excuse to abstain from intellectual συνουσίαι, cf. Proclus *In Tim.* I.22.10ff.

ity of soul alone, temperance not sharing in the body's passions, and justice the rule of reason over the inferior soul parts.[82] Proclus' contribution to this theory lies in defining particular virtues as characteristic of different levels of virtue. Courage, for instance, is most characteristic of the level of purification, whereas temperance belongs to ethical life and wisdom to that of contemplation.[83] Virtues such as courage, temperance and wisdom can occur across all different levels (civic, purificatory, contemplative), but their 'proper place', so to speak, is on one particular plane. What this means for our lost prologue is that Proclus would have read Socrates' confrontation with Xanthippe as confirming the σκοπός of the dialogue, because the particular virtue in question here is courage, which defines the purificatory way of life.

Socrates' remarks at *Phd*. 61a about philosophy as 'the greatest kind of music' are also glossed in interesting ways by Proclus. Proclus *In Crat*. 177.3 ff. Pasquali explains that philosophy is 'the greatest kind of music' because 'it makes our psychic powers move harmoniously and in agreement both with reality and the ordered movements of the cycles in the soul.' At *Crat*. 406a3–5, Socrates had derived the name of the Muses ἀπὸ τοῦ μῶσθαι καὶ τῆς ζητήσεώς τε καὶ φιλοσοφίας, and Proclus concurs with this etymology: the ζήτησις in question concerns the search for our own essences, as well as that of the universe (177.9–10). This search leads us to establish right, 'harmonious', relations: to ourselves by self-reversion, and to the universe by turning to the higher powers that organize it. Through these harmonious relations to self and universe the cycles in the soul imitate the cycles of the world soul. Another explanation why philosophy is the highest kind of music occurs at *In Remp*. I.57.8–23: philosophy orders the soul in accordance with the 'best kind of harmony, by means of which the soul is capable of ordering all human affairs and of worshipping the divine perfectly'. Underlying both passages is a fusion of Platonic ideas: on the one hand, an interpretation of the *Timaeus* according to which the human soul should imitate the circles of the world soul; on the other hand, the *Republic*'s notion that the soul has different parts that need to be harmoniously ordered. As might be expected, Proclus is eager to emphasize the divine origin of this philosophical harmony, which ultimately derives from the leader of the Muses, Apollo, whom the philosopher imitates.

[82] See Plotinus *Enn*. I.2.3.14–19.
[83] See Dam.I.152.1–3.

CHAPTER ONE

OLYMPIODORUS ON SUICIDE

1. *Philosophy As Μελέτη Θανάτου and the Prohibition of Suicide*

In the *Phaedo*'s opening exchanges, Socrates finishes his explanation why he has started composing verses with a strange piece of advice to the sophist Evenus: he, Evenus, should come running after Socrates if he is wise, but not by doing violence to himself, since the latter is considered unlawful. Cebes is rightly puzzled: if the philosopher is willing to follow the dying, why should it be unlawful if he does violence to himself? To put Cebes' objection more forcefully: if it is generally preferable for the philosopher to be dead rather than alive, why should he refrain from doing himself a service and leaving life by his own volition?

There is, then, a first puzzle how the idea of philosophy as a pursuit of death can be compatible with Socrates' prohibition of suicide. A second difficulty consists in defining the scope of the prohibition itself. On the one hand, Socrates introduces his case against suicide with an intractable sentence (*Phd*. 62a1–7) that effectively anticipates Cebes' possible objections to an unqualified prohibition.[1] Without getting into all the difficulties the sentence poses to the reader, the central worry it represents can be phrased in the following terms: why, of all things, should only this be 'simple', i.e. unqualified or without exception, that those for whom it is better to be dead than alive (if they exist at all) commit an act of impiety if they do themselves a service? The objection Socrates anticipates, in other words, tackles the question why suicide should be condemned in all cases, a position he seems to argue for in the following. Yet while it is possible to read Socrates' remarks at *Phd*. 61c on self-killing as an absolute condemnation, the phrase 'until god sends some necessity' (πρὶν ἀνάγκην τινὰ θεὸς ἐπιπέμψῃ; 62c7) seems to leave room for troublesome exceptions. How could a general and to all appearances absolute

[1] Cf. Gallop (1975), 79–83 for various possibilities of constructing the sentence.

condemnation of suicide be reconciled with Socrates' own act of drinking the fatal hemlock? What is the scope of 'necessity' in the clause allowing for exceptions?[2]

2. *Two Kinds of Death and Separation*

My main interest in this chapter is with Neoplatonic responses to the two problems I have set out. Beginning with the first, the consistency of Socrates' position in the *Phaedo*, we can trace an outline solution to the problem back to Porphyry. It is this solution to the *aporia* how the pursuit of death can be reconciled with suicide that is followed without any significant modifications by Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Elias and David. By the time of Ammonius, the definition of philosophy as μελέτη θανάτου, and its possible misinterpretation as an exhortation to suicide, had become a standard subject in the introductions to Porphyry's *Isagoge*.[3] The example of Cleombrotus who, after reading the *Phaedo*, climbed a wall and threw himself down a precipice occurs in Ammonius, together with a discussion of the relation between suicide and the pursuit of death.[4] Ammonius has no doubt that suicide is unlawful: he briefly summarizes his understanding of Socrates' two arguments against suicide, and goes on to explain the right way to understand the 'pursuit of death' (*In Isag*. 4.27–5.19).

Since man is a compound of body and soul, there are, according to Ammonius, two ways in which the two may be tied together. On the one hand, there is the natural bond with which the body is tied to the soul and brought to life by it; and, on the other, the voluntary bond with which the soul is tied to the body, and enslaved and governed by it. But just as there are two kinds of bonds, there are two ways they can be untied. When natural death occurs, the body is separated from the soul, while voluntary death is brought about by the philosopher striving to separate

[2] Damascius' comments on the 'necessity' at *Phd*. 62c7 are ambiguous. Dam.I.22 states that 'by necessity (ἀνάγκη) we must understand only that kind which compels the wise man (τοῦ σπουδαίου). Or maybe any kind of necessity'. However, in the case of Socrates' death, 'necessity' is to be understood as that kind which is brought about by the Good, because of which Socrates cannot escape his sentence (Dam.1.24).

[3] Ammonius *In Isag*. 4.15–5.27; Elias *Prol*. 12.6–16.8; David *Prol*. 29.13–33.33.

[4] Williams (1995) surveys interpretations of Cleombrotus' suicide throughout antiquity. For the Christian appropriation of Socrates' 'pursuit of death', see Siniossoglou (2008), 109–147.

the soul from the body. Neither natural nor philosophical death need to imply an absolute separation of body and soul, since it means one thing for the soul to become separated from the body, and another for the body to become separated from the soul. When the body has become unfit to receive the soul, it is thus separated from it, while the soul itself may not be completely separated from the body, in the sense that soul may still 'identify' with its defunct body. For Ammonius, examples for this scenario are the body-loving souls of the unenlightened deceased who hover around tombs as shadow-like phantoms (σκιοειδῆ φαντάσματα; *In Isag.* 5.23). Conversely, when the soul has separated itself from the body through philosophy, this does not in turn make the body unfit to be animated by the soul, and so does not have to bring about natural death.[5]

Ammonius does not go into any detail about what precisely is involved in pursuing 'voluntary death', but, following a distinction made by Woolf in a recent article, it seems to me that one can identify two key components to this idea.[6] On the one hand, one might think that the voluntary death by which the philosopher seeks to separate his soul from the body as far as possible concerns the abstention from bodily pleasures (the 'ascetic' reading). Alternatively, the philosopher's death could be concerned more with the right attitude towards pleasures and the concerns of the body (the 'evaluative' reading), as something of little value requiring a degree of internal detachment. In principle, this latter kind of detachment need not entail avoidance of all or even most physical pleasures, although it may be compatible with it. One reason for becoming an ascetic, for example, could consist in the low value that one attaches to these pleasures. I think it is correct to say that for Olympiodorus and Damascius, the notion of 'voluntary death' would involve both an evaluative stance and elements of an ascetic lifestyle. I cited an example of the evaluative stance in my introduction, namely that of the pain in Socrates' leg: even if the philosopher feels pleasure and pain, he will be detached from them and realize that they do not touch his true self but stay in one

[5] Ammonius takes many of his ideas from Porphyry, who makes a similar distinction between two kinds of bonds and deaths, and also reflects on souls hovering around tombs, if not quite in the same context. The central point is that nature's bond, which has tied the body to the soul, is different from the soul's bond, by which it ties itself to the body (by identifying with its pleasures, desires and opinions). Neither kind of death, remarks Porphyry, will have to follow the other in every case (*Sent.* 9.3–4).

[6] See Woolf (2004), 98 f.

part of his body.[7] What kinds of pleasure feature in the philosopher's life? Commenting on Socrates' disparaging remarks on pleasure at *Phd*. 64d, Olympiodorus and Damascius establish a division of pleasures into three kinds, as derived from the objects of desire. Thus, pleasures are either (i) natural and necessary (e.g. those of food, drink and sleeping); or (ii) natural but not necessary (sex); or (iii) neither necessary nor natural (ornaments) (Ol.3.5; Dam. I.69.5).[8] The true philosopher will avoid pleasures falling under type (ii) and (iii), and spend only little time caring for the bare necessities of life (i), and even then he will not take his full share of them. This emphasis on the reluctant enjoyment of necessary pleasures suggests to me that for Olympiodorus and Damascius, an ascetic lifestyle follows naturally from the concentration on the soul as the locus of one's true identity.[9]

3. *Two Ways of Arguing against Suicide*

If the compatibility of Socrates' prohibition of suicide with the 'pursuit of death' in the *Phaedo* presented no great difficulty for Ammonius and his ultimate source, Porphyry, the question whether suicide is or is not unlawful in all cases seems to have given rise to a variety of solutions by different Neoplatonic authors. It will be useful to distinguish here two general types of arguments: (i) arguments to the effect that it is *unlawful* to commit suicide, either because (a) the Demiurge has

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[7] Dam.I.161.4–6.

[8] This threefold division of pleasures is reminiscent of Epicurus' division of ἐπιθυμίαι at *Rat. Sent*. 29, although a distinction between necessary and unnecessary pleasures is already drawn in Book VIII of Plato's *Republic*, especially at 558d–559d. Proclus adds a fourth class to the three that are recognised by Epicurus, Olympiodorus and Damascius: necessary but not natural pleasures, such as indispensable clothing and shelter. Cf. Dam.I.69.8–9. In his *Philebus Commentary*, Damascius introduces a more complex hierarchy of pleasures, where each pleasure corresponds to a different level of reality (cf. *In Phil*. 155.1–9). The theoretical foundation for this latter division is very different from what we find in the *Phaedo Commentary*, however. In the *Phaedo Commentary*, Damascius distinguishes pleasures solely by their *objects*, as Dam.I.69.6 makes clear: 'he [sc. the commentator] distinguishes pleasures by the objects of appetite (ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρεκτῶν)'. In the *Philebus Commentary*, the criteria for distinguishing pleasures are more diverse, and notably include the *movement* that characterises them as well as the *activity* that gives rise to them. Damascius' theory of pleasure has been well explained by Van Riel (2000), esp. 173–176.

[9] From Damascius' *Philosophical History*, we learn that this philosophical ideal was still very much alive in his time. See, for example, the remarks on Isidore's frugal lifestyle (fr. 14C Athanassiadi), and that of his close friend Serapion (fr. 111.29ff. Athanassiadi).

tied together body and soul, and it is not ours to untie them,[10] or (b), because it is a perversion of the natural, metaphysically appropriate relationship between body and soul (which has itself been established by the Demiurge and the Young Gods);[11] and (ii), that suicide is *irrational*, because it harms the soul rather than benefitting it. According to (ii), it would be foolish to kill oneself in the hope of a better lot after death, since the emotions involved in committing suicide will drag down the soul in the afterlife and harm it. Plotinus is the surviving author who is of most interest for considerations of type (ii), Olympiodorus for those of type (i).

In his brief tractate on suicide (*Enn*. I.9), Plotinus' central objection to suicide is that one is 'not without passion' (l. 10) when committing the act. If the soul does violence to the body, it will 'take something' with it when departing to the next world.[12] One exception to this general point is the case of someone on the brink of madness. Plotinus' Greek is somewhat obscure at this point; the relevant lines and my translation are the following:

> Εἰ οὖν ἀρχὴν αἴσθοιτο τοῦ ληρεῖν; Ἢ τάχα μὲν οὐ περὶ σπουδαῖον· εἰ δὲ καὶ γένοιτο, τάττοιτ' ἂν ἐν τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις τοῦτο καὶ ἐκ περιστάσεως αἱρετοῖς, οὐχ ἁπλῶς αἱρετοῖς.
>
> But what if he feels he is starting to go mad? This will probably not happen to the wise man; but if it were to happen, he would place this among the necessary things, and those that are to be chosen according to the circumstances, but not to be chosen without qualification.
>
> (*Enn*. I.9.11–14)

It seems to me that τάττοιτ' ἂν ἐν τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις τοῦτο cannot refer to the encroaching madness which the sage is becoming aware of; it would make no sense to say that the wise man will choose madness according to circumstances. So the reference of τοῦτο here must be to suicide (clearly referred to in lines 9–10), which is to be chosen ἐκ περιστάσεως,

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[10] Proclus' comments on the relation between Themis and Demiurgy at *In Tim*. I.396.29ff. may have rendered this interpretation of Socrates' οὐ θεμιτὸν particularly plausible. For suicide as offence against the Demiurge, cf. esp. David *Prol*. 34.1–12.

[11] Arguments of type (b) are prominent in Olympiodorus' arguments 'of his own' (below, arguments (1) and (2)) and Elias *Prol*. 15.23–16.8.

[12] The origin of this argument seems to go back to a Chaldaean verse (fr. 166 des Places, cited by Plotinus at the opening of *Enn*. I.9) that rejects suicide: self-killing involves 'taking something with oneself' (τι ἔχουσα; presumably the passions that are involved in the act) when one departs (from life). Porphyry *de Abst*. 1.38.2 and Macrobius *In somn. Scip*. I.13 provide further evidence for type (ii) arguments.

as an unavoidable thing, but not as something desirable in itself.[13] The chapter closes with some scattered reflections that go back to its central thesis, that suicide is not in itself worthy of choice, and more likely to bring harm to the soul than benefit it. Leaving before one's allotted time is not a good thing, unless it is necessary (referring back to the case of madness) (ll. 15–17). As long as there is any hope of improvement in this world, suicide must be avoided, because one's rank in the next life depends on the state in which one leaves the present one (ll. 17–19).

Already in his early treatise on suicide, therefore, Plotinus allows for the possibility that suicide may at times be necessary, while at the same time maintaining the general thesis that in the overwhelming majority of cases suicide will do more harm than good. It is a reasonable and consistent position; the only thing missing from Plotinus' account is a clear criterion for distinguishing the legitimate cases of suicide which involve necessity from those that do not. Presumably the threat of losing reason, requisite for the exercise of the soul's highest function and its return to the heavenly fatherland, would be one major criterion for the legitimacy of suicide. Unfortunately, some evidence suggests that Plotinus considered other possible cases of legitimate suicide which do not involve an immediate threat to reason, such as being made a slave in war or suffering from intolerable pain.[14] But even if one succeeds in finding a criterion for legitimate suicide that would embrace these last two cases as well as that of madness, it is fair to say that Plotinus is less than explicit on this point.

In any case, Plotinus' more permissive attitude was to all appearances not taken over by Porphyry, who in his extant writings makes only a few passing references to suicide, and warns that it will not provide an easy way out for the philosopher.[15] Macrobius refers with approval to Plotinus'

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[13] It is tempting to think that Socrates' death in the *Phaedo* may have served Plotinus as the paradigm case for an act of self-killing that has to be accepted as a necessity and is to be chosen only ἐκ περιστάσεως. See *Phd*. 62c7.

[14] Cf. Plotinus *Enn*. I.4.7.27 ff. Rist (1967), 174–177 questions whether Plotinus would have considered suicide as ever practically acceptable for the philosopher. In his view, Plotinus' position is that 'the soul of the good will always decide for life' (177). In a similar vein, Cooper (1989), 37 asks how an endorsement of justified suicide could possibly be reconciled with Plotinus' conception of happiness. See, however, Dillon (1994) for a contrary view, according to which Plotinus held that suicide *can* be committed to advance the attainment of true happiness.

[15] Cf. *De abst*. 1.38.5–7: βίᾳ μὲν τοίνυν ἑαυτὸν ὁ φιλοσοφῶν οὐκ ἐξάξει· βιαζόμενος

arguments against suicide, but omits any mention of the fact that Plotinus left room for exceptional cases (*In Somn. Scip*. 1.13.5–20 Willis). There is a strong possibility that Macrobius read Plotinus through Porphyry's eyes; immediately after giving Plotinus' reason for thinking that suicide is not generally lawful, Macrobius refers to a doctrine found *in arcanis de animae reditu disputationibus*, i.e. in Porphyry's lost work *On the return of the soul* (*In Somn. Scip*. 1.13.16). The argument found in that treatise is that faults in this life are comparable to falling on flat ground, where it is easy to lift oneself up. But souls that leave this life with the stains of their faults, such as the souls of suicides, are like people throwing themselves into a precipice from which they will never be able to rise up again (*unde numquam facultas sit resurgendi*). A final objection raises the interesting question why someone who is completely purified (*perfecte purgatus*) should not choose to commit suicide, given that he would have made all the spiritual progress there is to make (*In Somn. Scip*. 1.13.17). But, replies Macrobius, by the very hope of enjoying blessedness (*spe fruendae beatitudinis*), the perfectly wise man will make himself subject to passion. For the philosopher, committing suicide in the hope of obtaining a better lot after death is thus to gamble away his choicest possession, *apatheia*.

In Porphyry and Macrobius, then, suicide seems to be condemned absolutely, although one must here account for the complicating factor that Porphyry's work, the likely source for Macrobius' comments, is largely lost. Plotinus, on the other hand, thinks that generally speaking suicide is damaging to the soul because it involves passion, and yet he allows for exceptional cases. Olympiodorus' stance on suicide is in many ways the counterpart to Plotinus'. Like Plotinus, Olympiodorus is attempting to reconcile the case against suicide with the intuition that in some extreme circumstances it may be justified.

4. *Olympiodorus' Three Arguments*

Olympiodorus' general discussion of suicide falls into four parts. First, he introduces three arguments 'of his own' (οἰκείοις ἐπιχειρήμασι; Ol.1.2.1)

γὰρ οὐδὲν ἧττον ἐκεῖ μενεῖ, ὅθεν ἀπελθεῖν βιάζεται ('Now the philosopher will not take himself out by violence; by doing violence to himself he remains none the less in the place from which he is forcing himself away'; tr. G. Clark). On Porphyry's stance on suicide, I have benefited from the remarks by Thiel (2001), 29–30.

against suicide.[16] Next, our commentator turns to Socrates' objections to suicide at *Phd*. 62b1–c4, which he divides into an esoteric (62b2–6) and an exoteric argument (b6–c4). With the main arguments against suicide thus laid out, Olympiodorus adduces a number of philosophical authorities and textual considerations that would suggest suicide is permissible in certain circumstances, before then concluding his case with a compromise formula that tries to take into account the conflicting arguments on both sides.

In this section, I am concerned with the opening of the theoretical discussion of suicide, i.e. Olympiodorus' 'arguments of his own'. The point in introducing the discussion of the text with independent arguments (based on key Neoplatonic notions such as fitness and imitation of the divine) is to demonstrate the concord between Plato's words and philosophical truth as such. We cannot compare them with anything in Damascius, but setting the particular issues raised in a text into their wider philosophical context was, in any case, a standard practice in the Neoplatonic commentary tradition.

The first argument begins with the claim that the gods can combine their care for secondary, inferior things with their contemplation of themselves. What we are to infer from this claim is that the philosopher, as imitator of the divine, should also be able to reconcile the demands of contemplation with his duty of care for the body.

> If god has two kinds of powers, elevative and providential (ἀναγωγούς τε καὶ προνοητικάς [*sc*. δυνάμεις]), and if those by which he exercises his providence to secondary beings do not stand in the way of his elevative and self-reverting powers, but he exercises both at the same time, then there is no reason why the philosopher as god's imitator (philosophy is becoming like god) should not engage with the temporal world[17] and act providentially, while at the same time leading a life of purification. For when one is separated from the body after death, living a life of purification is no great achievement, but as long as we are imprisoned in the body, to pursue purification is a noble thing. Thus Plato in the *Theaetetus* represents the perfect philosopher as not even knowing of what kind he is (ὁποῖός ἐστιν) himself, and moreover as ignorant of the fact that he does not know this, even though he lives in a body. (Ol.1.2.3–10; Ol.2.14–16 added[18])

[16] On the sense of ἐπιχείρημα, Brisson (1992), 483 remarks that the term can refer to either a syllogism designed to draw out the reasoning implicit in a text or to arguments constructed by an author to support his own theses (this latter sense is relevant here).

[17] γενεσιουργῶς ἐνεργεῖν: Westerink misleadingly translates 'act creatively'; Proclus *ET* prop. 209.21 Dodds shows that the basic meaning is 'engage in the world of generation'.

[18] I am transposing the *Theaetetus* reference at Ol.1.2.14–16 to come after Ol.1.2.10,

Central to this argument is a distinction between two divine functions: that of bringing about a conjunction with higher causes ('elevative'), and that of bestowing good things on lower beings according to their capacity to receive them ('providential'). It is of fundamental importance for Neoplatonic theology and ethics that these two functions be compatible with each other. On the theological level, the Epicureans were able to point out that involvement in the running of the world could jeopardize divine transcendence.[19] Complete transcendence of the gods, on the other hand, would sit uncomfortably with the idea that divine goodness is characterized by its generosity towards all that is below it.[20] On the ethical level, the sage must also be able to combine his activity of contemplation and purification with the day-to-day demands of the body and civic life. The extent to which the commentators succeed in harmonising the sage's different powers of contemplating and caring for others is a point I shall discuss more fully in chapter two.

The mention of Socrates' digression in the *Theaetetus* in Olympiodorus' account, finally, is designed to underline the point that pursuing purification in this life is a noble thing. At *Theaetetus* 174b, the philosopher is described as not knowing whether his neighbour is a man or some other kind of creature (εἰ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν ἤ τι ἄλλο θρέμμα), a passage which Olympiodorus picks up when he claims that the perfect philosopher does not know ὁποῖός ἐστιν. The relevance of this passage to the argument about the compatibility of two divine activities must lie in the perfect philosopher's power to pursue contemplation without directing his consciousness to his embodied aspects. Just as the gods do not 'consciously' direct lower things, but direct all their effort to contemplating first, so the philosopher can train his mind to contemplate without being interrupted by the everyday concerns with which he will have to deal at one time or another.[21]

The theological point that the gods' exercise of providence in no way abolishes their transcendence is explained in considerable detail in

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following Westerink's suggestion that 'the reference to *Theaetetus* 173c6–174a2 (lines 14–16) must relate to the first instead of to the second argument' (Westerink (1976) 38, *ad loc.*). Since the first argument directly presents the thought of the philosopher as imitator of the divine, based on the same *Theaetetus* passage, the suspicion of a textual displacement seems warranted.

[19] Cf. Epicurus *Rat. Sent.* 1, and texts 23B–E in Long and Sedley (1987).

[20] See Dodds (1963), 264–265 on *ET* 122.

[21] See Smith (1978) for a discussion of Plotinus' account of the empirical and higher levels of consciousness.

Proclus' *Elements of Theology* prop. 122. Providential care for secondary beings does not involve a relation (σχέσις) of the higher to the lower; rather, higher entities care for secondary lower entities simply in virtue of their nature–*bonum est diffusivum sui*, as later metaphysics has it. Consequently, transcendence does not preclude providential care, since the very essence of higher entities is goodness, to the extent in which they participate in the Good. I would tentatively suggest, however, that the real force behind Olympiodorus' argument is Ammonius, who is considerably more emphatic about the notion that the sage as imitator of the divine engages in both theoretic ('elevative') and practical ('providential') activity.[22]

We now come to Olympiodorus' second argument against suicide:

> In the same way as the divine is always present to all, and the degree in which each participates in it depends on its own fitness or unfitness (δὶ οἰκείαν ἐπιτηδειότητα ἢ ἀνεπιτηδειότητα), so the soul too should be present to the body and not separate herself, and the body will or will not participate in the soul depending on its [*sc.* the body's] own fitness or unfitness. (Ol.1.2.11–14)

The argument depends on the core Neoplatonic notion of fitness (ἐπιτηδειότης), which describes how lower entities can participate to varying degrees in the powers superior to them.[23] Since divine goodness is infinite and unchanging, differences in the degree which it is participated in by various entities must be explained solely in terms of the participants' own natures. From this metaphysical point, a moral lesson is drawn: the soul, which should strive to be like the divine as much as possible, should also be ever present to its inferiors (and especially the body), as long as they are capable of participating in it.

There is an interesting version of this argument in Elias (*Prol.* 15.23–16.2): the divine is always present to us, even though we may become unfit for it and judge it to be far away, like bats that turn away from the sun. Since the philosopher imitates the divine, he should exercise the right degree of providential concern for the body, rather than neglec-

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[22] Ammonius *In Isag.* 3.9–19 is a striking parallel to Olympiodorus' argument (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς διττὰς ἔχει τὰς ἐνεργείας, τὰς μὲν γνωστικάς […], τὰς δὲ προνοητικὰς τῶν καταδεεστέρων; ll. 9–10.13). See especially ll. 16–19 for the compatibility of contemplation and practical activity (ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος κατ' ἄμφω βούλεται ἐξομοιοῦν ἑαυτὸν τῷ θεῷ κτλ).

[23] For the notion of fitness as used by Olympiodorus, cf. Proclus *ET* 140; 143; 189 and Westerink (1964), 31.

ting it through his care for the soul. Only when the body has become unfit is the philosopher separated from all communion with it.

Oddly, Elias attributes this argument to Plotinus, who supposedly used it to argue against the Stoic doctrine of the five cases when suicide could be justified.[24] Since the argument Elias refers to has nothing to do with *Enn*. I.9, it was thought for a time that Elias relies on Plotinus' oral teaching. In reality, Elias probably had no notion at all of what Plotinus thought about suicide, and preserves a part of Proclus' *Phaedo Commentary* that has somehow disappeared from our notes of Olympiodorus' commentary.[25]

The third and final argument against suicide employs a distinction that is derived from Porphyry: 'what nature has bound together, that nature may loose, and what soul has bound together, that it itself may loose' (*Sent*. 8, tr. Dillon).[26]

> The voluntary bond (τὸν μὲν ἑκούσιον δεσμὸν) should be untied voluntarily, the involuntary bond (τὸν δὲ ἀκούσιον) involuntarily, and not conversely. Since natural life is involuntary, we should untie it by involuntary natural death, but the life that involves affections (τὴν δὲ μετ' ἐμπαθείας ζωὴν) and which we have chosen by our own free will we should untie by voluntary purification. (Ol.1.2.17–20)

Natural life, here, refers to the binding of the body to a soul; affective life to the binding of the soul itself to the body that it animates. We have already seen how Ammonius uses the distinction between two kinds of death (first clearly formulated by Porphyry) to solve the puzzle how Socrates' prohibition of suicide is compatible with the philosopher's pursuit of death.

It may seem puzzling that the argument places so much value on involuntary ties. If I have been enslaved by an enemy, should I not seize the right moment to escape? How is being tied to a body by nature significantly different from, say, being made a slave in war? Far from being an independent argument against suicide, it seems that we require some premise to the effect that the (involuntary) tie between soul and body has been established within a framework of providential care. In other words, it must be a theological argument: since we have been embodied not by ourselves but by the Young Gods, we should leave it

[24] For more details, see below, p. 46.
[25] A case convincingly argued by Westerink (1964).
[26] Cf. *Sent*. 8–9, with commentary in Brisson (2002), 395–399.

to the running of nature (under their supervision) to free us, rather than rebel against them. The use of the term δέσμος here points at any rate towards the *Timaeus*, and can hardly have failed to remind a Platonic audience of the Young Gods' binding of soul and body. Damascius' remarks at Dam.I.16.1 ff. bear witness to the relevance of *Tim.* 42c6–43a6 to the argument against suicide, which is paraphrased in the language of δεσμεύουσι/λύουσι ἀπὸ τῶν δεσμῶν.

What about the voluntary tie with which the soul ties itself to the body? The central idea behind this conception derives from Socrates' long defence in the *Phaedo* (63b–69e; see next chapter): the soul of the philosopher tries to draw and gather itself together from the body (cf. 67a7) and avoids all communion with it (67a3). When incarnate, the degree to which we identify with the pleasures and pains of the body (its 'affections') is voluntary, but the wise man will separate the two as far as possible. One might wish to say against Olympiodorus' argument that any soul that is embodied and exercises providential care for its own body (see arguments one and two) is going to have to share in the body's affections in some sense, e.g. recognising that hunger and pain need to be acted upon. Yet as we have seen in Olympiodorus' first argument, the soul's duty of care for the body need not interfere with the activity of contemplation, presumably because it is exercised in a different, less than fully conscious, manner.

It is worth dwelling on some further reasons that we find in Olympiodorus why life in the body is no obstacle for contemplation, since the degree to which the contemplative ideal can be realized in embodied life is an issue that has a great bearing on the question of suicide. More generally, it raises an interesting question about the significance of natural death in Neoplatonism: if we cannot become true contemplators in this life, should we wish for natural death, or even force it? For Plotinus, the significance of natural death is slight, because he maintains that a part of the soul always remains in the intelligible world.[27] We can become aware of this higher part of the soul fully when embodied, so that the separation of body and soul adds little to the philosopher's perfection. Only in some very rare cases does the body have the power to distract the soul from its proper tasks, and in such circumstances the forcible separation of the two may be excused. With Porphyry, on the other hand, we find a pronounced desire for disembodied existence after death, coupled with

[27] Cf. e.g. *Enn.* IV.8.8.2 f.; V.1.10.13–18; VI.2.22.31–33.

a strong emphasis on the importance of purification from the body in this life. While contemplation is attainable in this life for Plotinus, Porphyry's more pessimistic attitude leads him to be more emphatic about the virtues of purification, not those of contemplation. Natural death, for Porphyry, would seem to be of greater significance.[28]

Olympiodorus considers the question whether life in the body is an obstacle to contemplation in the course of discussing *Phd*. 66b–67b, on the distracting influence of the body (Ol.6.3). 'The ancients'[29] do not admit a life of contemplation while in the body, and Plato too seems not to admit it, since he says in the *Phaedo* that it is not possible to know the truth while in the body. Olympiodorus however, reasons that since it is possible to be part of a *politeia* outside of the body, it must be possible to live the contemplative life while in the body.[30] In other words, the philosopher's soul ascends to the true commonwealth of the gods after death and joins in their government, even though separation from the body is generally understood as characteristic of the *contemplative*, not the civic, life.[31] By inverse reasoning, even though embodied life is characteristically civic life,[32] we should nonetheless be able to live for the sake of contemplation in this life. Olympiodorus' solution, then, is that the philosopher can deal with the body as with a talkative neighbour, without being disturbed in his own thoughts. He pays only as much attention to his body as he needs to prevent it from hindering the soul's activities. A Platonic text to support this view is the digression of the *Theaetetus*, which we have already encountered in Olympiodorus' first argument: the philosopher does not know where on earth he is, and is ignorant of this ignorance.

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[28] Cf. Augustine's references to Porphyry's doctrine that *omne corpus fugiendum esse* at (e.g.) *De civ. Dei* X.29 (I.398.34 Dombart-Kalb); XIII.17 (I.511.27); XIII.19 (I.515.22). Cf also *Sent*. 32.94ff. for the centrality of the purificatory virtues in ethical life. I am indebted here to the remarks by Smith (1974), 69–83.

[29] Cf. Westerink (1976), 99, who cites Porphyry *Sent*. 32.94–96, where only the purificatory ideal is said to be attainable in this life.

[30] Ol.6.3.4 mentions ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς. This may be the redactor's way of referring to Olympiodorus himself (cf. Ol.11.2.9 and 11.6.13 for parallels) or possibly Ammonius, as Westerink (1976), 99 suggests. Damascius' view is that a complete life of contemplation is possible in the world of generation, though more perfect in the next (Dam.I.115.4–5).

[31] For the background to the idea that souls are citizens in the order of the cosmos (inspired in part by reading *Rep*. IX.592b as pointing forwards to the *Timaeus*), cf. e.g. Proclus *In Tim*. I.33.1–14; *In Remp*. II.100.5ff. O'Meara (2003) gives a wider survey over Platonic 'cosmopolitanism'.

[32] See ch. 2.3 below for more on the relation between embodied and civic life.

On this account, the duties that souls must fulfil in the world of generation are compatible with the higher aspirations of the soul by itself. To come back to Olympiodorus' arguments against suicide, we can summarize our findings as follows. Philosophically, Olympiodorus has established that there is no conflict between the soul's contemplation of itself and its care for the body. It is the responsibility of the philosopher as imitator of the divine to let the body participate in soul to the degree possible. Since the relation between body and soul has been established involuntarily, i.e. by the Demiurge, it is not ours to untie. The separation of the soul from the body, however, can be attained in this life, so that physical death is not the only way of achieving complete purification and contemplation.

5. *The Esoteric Doctrine*

Having set out three independent arguments against suicide, Olympiodorus next turns to the text of the *Phaedo* itself. As his first consideration on the subject of suicide, Socrates refers to the doctrine that men are 'as in a kind of prison' (ὡς ἔν τινι φρουρᾷ) in this life, which is taught in secret discourses (ἐν ἀπορρήτοις; *Phd.* 62b3–4).[33] This account appears to Socrates 'great and not easy to discern' (μέγας τέ τίς μοι φαίνεται καὶ οὐ ῥᾴδιος διιδεῖν; 62b5–6). Appropriately, we do not find any further discussion of the 'secret' account that is taught by Philolaus and others. The doctrine of Philolaus is such that even his disciple Simmias has not grasped anything clear about it (*Phd.* 61d8 f.), and at any rate too mysterious to provide a solution to the problem at hand.[34] Thus, Socrates shifts his attention to the idea that the gods are our guardians: since we are in their power, it is not ours to decide when we want to leave this world, just like a master would be angry if his slave chose to kill himself.[35]

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[33] For my present purposes, it is unnecessary to engage in the debate whether φρουρά means 'custody' or 'prison'. The latter reading is that taken up in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, and probably goes back to Xenocrates. Boyancé (1963) collects the relevant evidence in the Platonic tradition.

[34] If one assumes that Cebes and Simmias have Pythagorean leanings, there is an irony in 'the paradoxical spectacle of Socrates having to persuade the Pythagoreans of the truth of their own doctrines', as Sedley (1995), 11 points out.

[35] Damascius makes the interesting point that we must not understand the analogy between gods-humans and master-slave literally, since we cannot attribute human emotions to the gods. Rather, 'anger' and 'revenge' as applied to the gods should be under-

Judging from the text of the *Phaedo*, there is only one real argument put forward by Socrates, namely this analogy between gods-humans and masters-slaves. Olympiodorus and Damascius, however, treat Socrates' obscure passing reference to a mythical doctrine as an independent 'esoteric' argument that is then followed by an 'exoteric' one. Damascius' discussion of the prohibition of suicide would apparently have contained a methodological section setting out ten interpretative guidelines that must underlie a good interpretation of the esoteric argument and its notion of a 'prison' from which we must not escape, but unfortunately the text is mutilated where it discusses guidelines 5–9.[36] There are, however, some insights one can take away from it. The esoteric doctrine (1) must be specific to the problem of suicide, rather than being general (Dam.I.1.1–2); (2) it must not be obvious and 'caught with one hand';[37] (3) the mystic argument must be 'more august' than the philosophical one, since Socrates can discuss the latter openly; and finally, (4), 'the plurality of gods must follow the monad' and the principles of the orders[38] should not be discrepant.[39] Omitting points 5–9, the last principle (10) tells us that the explanation of the esoteric argument pertains to the telestic nature (τῆς τελεστικῆς ἐστιν ἰδιότητος ἡ αἰτία), and is neither higher nor lower. One cannot be too confident about what Damascius means here, but one strong possibility is that he considers the myth to relate to that part of philosophy that is specifically concerned with the purification of the pneumatic vehicle of the rational soul. The term 'telestic' is commonly used in that sense by different Neoplatonists.[40]

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stood in their proper metaphysical signification, either in the sense that they 'withhold' their own light (anger), or as a secondary form of providence that bestows punishment (revenge). Cf. Dam.I.19.4–6.

[36] Westerink (1977), 27 offers a possible reconstruction, which cannot, however, serve as more than an example of what might have been discussed in points 5–9.

[37] Olympiodorus tells us that the point of Socrates' esoteric argument cannot be that embodied life is a prison and a punishment we have to endure, since this is too obvious to feature in a truly esoteric argument. (Ol.1.3.11f.).

[38] Westerink's proposal to read τάξεων in line 8 makes good sense of the passage.

[39] Principle (4) relates to a particular discussion about monads and pluralities, and effectively concerns the relationship between the esoteric and the exoteric argument. It will transpire that the first starts with a monad (Dionysus or the 'Young God', as he is called at Dam.I.14.1), a more unified and divine principle, which is then broken up (by the Titans); the second starts with a plurality (the Young Gods), and only then reaches towards the monad (Helios, who is connected to Apollo in a triadic series). Cf. Westerink (1977) on Dam.I.14–15.

[40] See the comments by Schibli (2002), 98–118 and 318 n. 35.

It is, first of all, interesting to note that a commentator should judge the esoteric argument to be sufficiently puzzling or important to devote an entire discussion to its likely σκοπός before giving his interpretation. The ten criteria must have been used much more extensively to rule out previous interpretations of the 'prison'; all we have left in Damascius are the results of this procedure, not the reasoning behind it. Thus, Dam.I.2 surveys three mistaken opinions: 'some' think that the 'prison' is no other than the Good; Numenius that it is pleasure; Paterius that it is the Demiurge. Only Numenius seems to make use of the connotation of φρουρά as 'prison', by identifying it with the pleasures that ensnare and enslave souls in the world of generation. Paterius and those who think the φρουρά is the Good play on the sense of the word that includes watchmanship or protection, so that they can refer the esoteric argument to our dependence on divine powers.

In the end, it is the opinion of Xenocrates (taken up again by Porphyry) that wins Damascius' favour: the prison is Titanic and leads up to Dionysus. Our bodies belong to Dionysus, who has been torn apart by the Titans and eaten, on account of Hera's plotting. The ensuing punishment of the Titans, administered by Zeus' thunderbolts, creates the matter from which men were created. Since the Titans are imbued with Dionysiac flesh, their sooty[41] remains still contain the pieces of Dionysus which will become the matter of our bodies.[42] Hence, committing suicide is a direct offense against Dionysus, whose parts constitute us.

Whether this myth preserves some mystical tradition or not, its main interest for the commentators seems to lie in the opportunities for allegorisation that it offers, rather than its literal meaning. Thus, Olympiodorus interprets the four Orphic reigns of Uranus, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus not as temporal successions but as ever-present realities in the soul at different levels of virtue, contemplative, purificatory, civic and

[41] Cf. Ol.1.3.8–9: ἐκ τῆς αἰθάλης τῶν ἀτμῶν τῶν ἀναδοθέντων ἐξ αὐτῶν ὕλης γενομένης γενέσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ('from the soot of the vapours sent forth by these [*sc.* thunderbolts] the matter from which men were created came to be'; tr. Westerink, slightly modified). Brisson (1992), 492–494 discusses the possible influence of alchemical literature on Olympiodorus' interpretation of the myth, and credits him with considerable originality. It is certainly striking that Olympiodorus is prepared to speak of our 'Dionysiac' *bodies*, when Neoplatonists such as Proclus and Damascius would usually place a divine element in the soul alone.

[42] This much may go back to an original Orphic source, although some due scepticism should remain about Olympiodorus' report. It remains difficult to mark off the original Orphic material from Neoplatonic ethico-metaphysical allegorising.

ethical or natural respectively. The last category is symbolized by the reign of Dionysus because ethical or natural virtues 'do not imply each other' (οὐκ ἀνταϰολοῦθουσιν; Ol.1.5.9), which is why he is torn apart.[43] Moreover, the Titans chewing Dionysus' flesh are symbolic of 'deep division' (ὁ πολὺς μερισμὸς; Ol.1.5.11 f.), because Dionysus is the patron of this world, where division prevails 'because of "mine" and "yours"' (διὰ τὸ ἐμὸν ϰαὶ σόν). One can note here a faint echo of the *Republic*'s claim that any city where words such 'mine' and 'not mine' (τό τε ἐμὸν ϰαὶ τὸ οὐκ ἐμόν; *Rep*. V.462c4–5) are not uttered at the same time is liable to be dissolved. The political significance of the *Republic*'s point, however, is completely lost, and the idea of division applied to the individual consciousness rather than the city.[44] An allegorising use of etymology popular among Neoplatonists, finally, derives the 'Titans' from the Greek word τι, denoting the particular, since the Titans break down the universal form or monad of Dionysus.

But rather than losing ourselves in the different Neoplatonic allegorisations of the Orphic myth, we must come back to the question what all this adds to our understanding of Socrates' prohibition of suicide. I think the central point of the Orphic myth, at least for Damascius, is the following: there is a particular mode of existence (or, as we would say, a 'state of mind') that is sinful. It comes about when the soul thinks of itself as living in isolation from the rest of the Neoplatonic universe, when it exercises a specious form of self-determination (αὐτεξουσία).[45] That same mode of existence is responsible for our embodiment, which is the result of the soul's desire to express itself through an individual character (τὸ ἴδιον). Embodiment is a kind of moral lesson: the soul has been bound to a body so that it will 'feel the need for a common form and learn what it is like to be individual' (ἵνα τοῦ ϰοινοῦ εἴδους ἐν χρείᾳ γένηται ϰαὶ μάθῃ οἷόν ἐστι τὸ ἴδιον; Dam.I.10.5.5–6). This is the first step towards its turning to Dionysus, in whom deliverance resides. If we commit suicide,

[43] The doctrine of the mutual implication (ἀνταϰολουθία) of the virtues, derived ultimately from Aristotle *NE* VI.1144b32–1145a2, features prominently in Stoicism (*SVF* III.275; 295; 299; 302; 310). It is taken over by Alcinous (*Did*. 29.3.10 Louis/183.3 Hermann), Plotinus (*Enn*. I.2.7.1) and Porphyry (*Sent*. 32.61–62), and recurs in the same terms in Proclus (*In Alc*. 319.9), Olympiodorus (*In Alc*. 214.10–11) and the Greek commentators on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Eustratius, Michael, Anonymus *In NE II.–V*).

[44] Rappe (2000), 165 describes the Dionysiac state of mind well: 'The uninitiated, ordinary human being is characterized by a distracted, dispersed form of attention that is egoistic, self-centred and desperately in need of enlightenment.'

[45] Cf. Dam.I.9.3; 23.

we still exercise the specious form of self-determination when we should really be kept in custody to learn our lesson. The problem with suicide explored in the esoteric argument, then, appears to be that by violating our (Dionysiac) bodies, we follow our Titanic nature, which breaks up 'the connatural form and our partnership, as it were, with what is above and below' (τὸ ὁμοφυὲς εἶδος καὶ οἷον κοινωνικὸν πρὸς τὰ κρείττω καὶ ἥττω; Dam.I.9.5 f.). Our term of imprisonment in the body is a necessary act of justice and serves the soul as a reminder of its initial sin.

In essence, then, the esoteric argument states that the gods fix the term of our imprisonment in the body, and that it is in our own interest to keep it. The Neoplatonic interpretation of the Orphic myth that is applied to the esoteric argument adds a larger theological and cosmological context to the discussion. Philosophically, however, both the esoteric and the exoteric argument reach the same conclusion, namely that suicide is οὐ θεμιτὸν, except that one account gives reasons, whereas the other captures truth in the manner of symbols (Dam.I.15.5–9).

6. *The Philosophical Argument*

Since Olympiodorus' 'arguments of his own' have already established the principal complaints against suicide, it is unsurprising that he spends little time discussing Socrates' actual philosophical argument at *Phd*. 62b–c.[46] The relevant passage in Olympiodorus summarizes the argument as follows:

> If the gods are taking care of us and we are their possessions, we should not take ourselves out, but leave it to them. If only one of the two assumptions were true, and we were either possessions of the Gods, but they did not take care of us, or conversely, there would be some reasonable (εὔλογος) grounds for us to take ourselves out. But as it is, we must not loosen the bond for those two reasons. (Ol.1.7.2–6)

It is interesting that Olympiodorus introduces the hypothetical consideration that suicide would be justified if one of the premises of the dialectical argument fails. In principle, then, he is already willing to consider reasons for justified suicide independent of any pollution with emotions

[46] Damascius' comments (Dam.I.14-25) on the exoteric argument do not add anything of philosophical interest, with one exception. Dam.I.20 makes the good point that the relationship between the gods and human suicides can only be analogous to that of a master and his runaway slave if one assumes that the soul is separable; otherwise it would be impossible to punish the suicide.

(such as hope or despair) that might go with it. As things are, of course, reason for suicide cannot derive from our relation with the gods, who are able to combine the properties of superiority and mastership with providential care.[47] In a well-ordered universe where the gods look after us, there are no rational grounds for suicide.

7. *The Case for Suicide*

Olympiodorus' discussion so far does not suggest that there are any exceptions to the general rule that suicide is prohibited. As it happens, however, our philosopher next turns to the case in favour of the notion that suicide can sometimes be rationally justified. Rather than producing developed arguments, Olympiodorus makes brief allusions to a number of philosophical authorities, presented in a list-like fashion. In a final part of his lecture, Olympiodorus will then incorporate the conclusion that suicide can sometimes be justified into his own Platonist thesis that suicide is generally unlawful in so far as it violates the body. It is intriguing to think that the summary way in which the case for suicide is presented may refer back to a legacy of controversy that has entered the curriculum in this condensed and formalized manner. Due to our lack of evidence, however, it remains but to note that a fuller commentary such as that by Proclus would probably have included more detailed arguments and doxographical material.

As his first piece of evidence that Plato himself thought suicide could be legitimate, Olympiodorus observes that Socrates' own conclusion to the discussion of suicide at *Phd*. 62c7–8 is feeble. All that is shown is that 'perhaps' or 'probably' (ἴσως) a man will not kill himself, 'unless god sends some great necessity'. Next, our commentator distinguishes three classes of men, who may each commit suicide legitimately. Each class corresponds to a different Platonic dialogue.[48] Thus, the wise are permitted suicide in accordance with the *Phaedo*; the middle group of men on the strength of *Rep*. III.407d4–c2, which tells us that the incurably ill may decline certain treatments and prefer death for the sake of the city; and finally the worthless group of men, who may choose to end their lives if they suffer from incurable wicked passions, as Plato mentions at *Leg*. IX.854a5–c5.

[47] See also the remarks on *Phd*. 62d5–6 at Dam.I.29.
[48] Cf. *SVF* III.519; Plotinus *Enn*. V.9.1.

Olympiodorus' third and fourth references are to non-Platonic writings, namely Plotinus and the Stoics. The reference to the authority of Plotinus and his treatise 'on justified suicide' (*Enn*. I.9) in support of the case for suicide comes as a surprise, and has led Westerink to conclude that Olympiodorus 'remembered only the title and had no clear notion of the content of the treatise, which is entirely concerned with arguments against suicide'.[49] *Pace* Westerink, however, we have seen that Plotinus does leave room for exceptional cases of suicide: guardedly in *Enn*. I.9, and more explicitly in I.4. It is therefore not inconceivable that a reader of the treatise may have included it in a list of authorities in favour of suicide. To be sure, this is unlikely to have been Olympiodorus; but first-hand knowledge of Plotinus is well attested in Proclus, who wrote a commentary on the *Enneads*.

The final and fourth argument in favour of suicide is based on the authority of the Stoics, who adduce five grounds for suicide ((i) noble sacrifice, (ii) avoiding betrayal of secrets, (iii) senility, (iv) incurable disease, (v) poverty with no chance of support from virtuous people), by way of an elaborate analogy between the breaking up of a symposium and the taking of one's life.[50] The permissiveness of the Stoic argument, reproduced by Olympiodorus without any attempt to enter into further discussion or problems, is remarkable, but up to this point, we cannot say whether arguments of the kind presented by the Stoics in favour of suicide had any influence on Olympiodorus' own solution or not. In my next section, I hope to show that our commentator's solution to the problem of suicide can be explained entirely in Platonic terms.

8. *Olympiodorus' Conclusion*

In the previous sections, we have seen how Olympiodorus' three Platonic arguments against suicide all converged into the position that suicide is unlawful, whereas both Plato and other philosophical authorities leave room for exceptional cases where suicide can be justified. The puzzle, then, is to explain how suicide can somehow combine two attributes

[49] Westerink (1976), 49 *ad loc*. Cf. Dillon (1994), 234 n. 13, who remarks that 'it is possible that [Olympiodorus] is reflecting a view of Plotinus' doctrine on suicide derived rather from *Enn*. I.4 than from this tractate [*Enn*. I.9] or the one that Elias is summarizing'.

[50] Cf. Elias *Prol*. 14.25–29.

that do not normally qualify the same action, i.e. being both unlawful and justified. Although Olympiodorus does not say so explicitly, one might think that unlawful acts will typically be unjustified and justified acts lawful. The central passage outlining Olympiodorus' position can conveniently be divided into three sections (Ol.1.9):

[1] Τί οὖν ἡμεῖς φαμεν; εἰς ἀντίφασιν γὰρ περιέστη ὁ λόγος· πῶς γὰρ καὶ ἀθέμιτον τὸ ἐξάγειν ἑαυτὸν καὶ εὔλογον; ἢ οὐ δεῖ μὲν ἐξάγειν ἑαυτὸν ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ σώματι, πρὸς κακοῦ γάρ ἐστι τοῦτο τῷ σώματι· ἀλλὰ καὶ εὔλογον ἐξάγειν ἑαυτοὺς διὰ μεῖζον ἀγαθὸν συντελοῦν τῇ ψυχῇ, οἷον ὡς ἡνίκα βλάπτεται ὑπὸ τοῦ σώματος.

[2] ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ βουλευόμενος ἐκεῖνα αἱρεῖται οἷς ἐλάσσονα μὲν κακὰ ἕπεται, μείζω δὲ ἀγαθά,

[3] καὶ ὥσπερ ἀνόσιον μὲν φίλῳ τυπτομένῳ μὴ ἀμύνειν, εἰ δὲ τύπτοιτο ὑπὸ πατρός, οὐκ εὔλογον ἀμύνειν, οὕτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἀθέμιτον ἐξάγειν ἑαυτὸν διὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ εὔλογόν ποτε διὰ τὴν ψυχήν, λυσιτελοῦντος αὐτῇ ποτὲ τούτου.

[1] What then do we say, given that the argument has been brought into contradiction? For how can taking oneself out be both unlawful and justified? Unless it is because one must not take oneself out insofar as the body is concerned, since this is an evil for the body, but it is justified for the sake of a greater good to the soul, such as when the soul is harmed by the body.

[2] For just as someone chooses what brings fewer evils and greater goods,

[3] and just as it is impious not to help a friend when he is being beaten, but if the one who beats him should happen to be his father, coming to his help is not justified, so here too taking oneself out is forbidden on account of the body, but justified in certain cases on account of the soul, because it may sometimes be beneficial for the soul.

Our first section [1] introduces the apparent contradiction that is the outcome of Olympiodorus' arguments for and against suicide (cf. l. 1: εἰς ἀντίφασιν γὰρ περιέστη ὁ λόγος). The solution to the puzzle we are given at section [1] of the above passage is that suicide is unlawful in one respect, i.e. as far as the body is concerned, which is destroyed, but justified in another, i.e. as procuring a greater good for the soul, in such cases where it is harmed by the body.

The qualifications διὰ τὸ σῶμα and διὰ τὴν ψυχήν thus provide a way of escaping the initial contradiction of the same action appearing both unlawful and justified. Suicide, on Olympiodorus' account, is the battle ground between two potentially conflicting ethical commands—to care providentially for one's body on the one hand, and to focus one's attention

on the true self, the soul, on the other. The analogy at [3] illustrates this point with the example of a possible conflict between respect for paternal authority and the duty to help one's friends.

The source of the conflict between two ethical imperatives is ultimately, of course, man's embodied condition in the realm of generation. A comparison with a passage in Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Alcibiades* shows quite strikingly how two attributes that should normally occur together with respect to the same action are driven apart when one considers man as a composite of body and soul. In discussing the interpretative goal of Plato's *Alcibiades*, Olympiodorus argues that the dialogue is concerned with soul: 'since it has been taught here that the just and the advantageous follow each other, it is clear that the discourse is about soul, because only in the case of soul is the just advantageous, but not in the compound [of body and soul]. For the death of Menoikeus is just, since it is for the sake of his country, but it is not useful for the body, which perishes'.[51] Menoikeus' death (cf. Eur. *Ph*. 834–1017) is clearly recognized and discussed as a suicide by Platonist commentators; the passage quoted is thus a relevant example for the kind of reasoning at work in Olympiodorus' comments on the *Phaedo*.[52] Since suicide is an action that concerns both body and soul, just like the death of Menoikeus, it is clear that it runs into the same kind of difficulty, i.e. combining what should not be combined, and dissociating what should not be dissociated. In the case of soul by itself, any action that has the true good of the soul as its end will be both lawful and justified; in the same way, the just will always be beneficial to the rational soul. Only with regard to actions that concern the compound of soul and body does this equation of the two terms not hold, giving rise to the apparent contradiction that we began with.

At section [2] above, our commentator explains what general principle of moral deliberation lies behind his idea that suicide can be justified for the sake of the soul, even though it is unlawful in so far it destroys the body: a deliberating agent will choose the lesser evil and the greater good. The idea of weighing up goods and evils occurs prominently at Plato

[51] *In Alc*. 3.15–4.2 Westerink: ἔτι δὲ κἀκ τοῦ παραδίδοσθαι τὸ δίκαιον ἐνταῦθα καὶ τὸ συμφέρον ἀντιστρέφοντα, δῆλον ὅτι περὶ ψυχῆς ὁ λόγος· ταύτῃ γὰρ μόνῃ συμφέρει τὸ δίκαιον, οὐ γὰρ τῷ συναμφοτέρῳ· ὁ γὰρ Μενοικέως θάνατος δίκαιος μέν, ὡς ὑπὲρ πατρίδος, οὐ συνήνεγκεν δὲ τῷ σώματι φθαρέντι.

[52] The example of Menoikeus' death recurs at Elias *Prol*. 14.25–29, where it is cited in the context of the Stoic analogy between breaking up a symposium and ending one's life.

Prot. 356b–c, although the more immediate source for Olympiodorus may be a passage in the *Gorgias*, from which a threefold division of goods is derived (508c4–509c5).[53] Thus, in his *Commentary on the Gorgias*, Olympiodorus elaborates:

> The greatest good is that of the soul, less [good] than that is the good of the body, and less still that of the externals. We should be more concerned about the greatest good and choose the lesser evil for the sake of the greatest good. [….]
>
> Hence we should concern ourselves in every case with the greatest good, despising the body. And it is a fine thing, as has been said, to betray neither, neither one's soul nor one's body, but if violence should come upon one, it is better to embrace the soul, and not betray it, and to hand the body over to embrace the one who wants to beat or abuse it.
>
> (*In Gorg.* 36.3.16–19; 4.9–14.; tr. Jackson/Lycos/Tarrant)

This principle, which would clearly justify e.g. Socrates' act of drinking the hemlock, as well as some acts of self-sacrifice, does not at first sight have an immediate bearing on the issue whether it is ever justified to actively destroy the body oneself rather than surrendering to its destroyer. Nonetheless, the injunction to always choose the lesser evil for the sake of the greater good, that of the soul, and to despise the body is certainly relevant to the justification of suicide, and features in much the same terms at our section [2] in the passage from Olympiodorus' *Phaedo Commentary*.

As a preliminary conclusion, we can say that Olympiodorus does not sacrifice any doctrinal common ground between his own claims and those of other Neoplatonists: his acceptance of the base line thesis that suicide is unlawful (ἀθέμιτος, presumably understood in reference to divine law, θέμις) or alternatively unholy (ἀνόσιος, again with reference to the divine) places him squarely within the Neoplatonic tradition.[54] The priority of the good of the soul over that of the body, too, is an unexceptional Platonic doctrine, and provides the principle behind Olympiodorus' position. What might come as a surprise is Olympiodorus' admission that the body may in certain circumstances harm the soul. He

[53] The threefold division of goods into those of the soul, the body and external goods was a well-established commonplace in antiquity. See, for example, Aristotle *NE* 1098b13–14; Diogenes Laertius *Vit. Phil*. 3.80; Sextus *Adv. Math*.11.44–45.

[54] Damascius distinguishes between the meaning of 'unlawful' (ἀθέμιτον), 'impious' (οὐχ ὅσιον) and 'not permissible' (οὐ δέον) at Dam.I.13, but Olympiodorus appears to use the three terms indiscriminately.

does not give us any examples, unfortunately, but his way of putting the issue could seem rather unorthodox for a Neoplatonist.[55] For Plotinus, for example, the soul's true nature cannot be affected by the body at all, since it does not fully descend. Proclus, too, makes a similar point in an interesting passage in his *Alcibiades Commentary*: the sufferings of the body do not reach up to the soul, and an action that is noble can only be evil incidentally, to the extent that one might consider the death of the body an evil at all (*In Alc.* 333.7–16). On this line of argument, excruciating pain would not be a reason for suicide, because the sufferings of the body cannot themselves directly affect the soul. Cases of self-sacrifice in battle, on the other hand, might well be justified on the grounds Proclus provides here, since the nobility of an action is not affected by any damage the body might suffer as a consequence.

I think, therefore, that Olympiodorus cannot mean that the body can at times directly harm the soul. Yet while our commentator gives us a general principle that could help reconcile the arguments for and against suicide, he is, by all appearances, not concerned with the sort of detailed reasoning that would go into applying his principle to specific cases. Whether this is all Olympiodorus' lecture was designed to offer or reluctance on his part to get involved into contentious discussions with his (no doubt partly Christian) audience, we do not know. His pupils Elias and David, in any case, preserve no trace of Olympiodorus' solution and condemn suicide irrespective of whether it may be justified or not.[56]

[55] Another peculiar aspect of Olympiodorus' discussion is a passage (Ol.3.11.7–8) where we find the claim that philosophy as a 'striving for death' can be understood to include *physical* as well as 'voluntary' [*sc.* in regard to the passions] death, on the grounds that physical death is the image (εἰδώλον) of voluntary death. The true philosophers, therefore, will not only pursue and choose voluntary death, but that of the body also. This way of correlating the two ideas of voluntary and physical death using the Neoplatonists' favourite relation of original to image seems untrue to Porphyry's original idea of keeping the two kinds of death conceptually distinct. Olympiodorus' language of 'choosing physical death' suggests, at any rate, an active decision to end life, i.e. suicide.

[56] Cf. David *Prol.* 34.1: Ἔστι δὲ εἰπεῖν ὅτι οὔτε εὐλόγως οὔτε ἀλόγως δεῖ τινα ἀναιρεῖν ἑαυτόν κτλ ('But we must say that one should not kill oneself, with or without justification …'); Elias *Prol.* 15.23–16.8.

CHAPTER TWO

POLITICS AND PURIFICATION IN SOCRATES' SECOND DEFENCE (*PHD*. 63B–69E)

1. *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Olympiodorus found a compromise solution to the question whether suicide is lawful or not. If he had resolved the problem by making considerations concerning the soul 'trump' concerns about the dissolution of the living being, the relation between soul and body will come into even sharper focus in the next part of the *Phaedo Commentaries*. In the following, I will trace the contrast between the philosopher involved in civic life (ὁ πολιτικός) and the philosopher pursuing the path of purification (ὁ καθαρτικός, who may upon fully separating himself from the body become ὁ θεωρητικός) in Socrates' second defence speech (*Phd*. 63b–69e). As we will see, the distinction between the two is condensed into a difference in attitude towards the body and the use of pleasure and pain. What consequences would such a move entail for Neoplatonic political theory? Specifically, do the civic and the purificatory way of life pursue the same end, different and compatible ends, or different and incompatible ends? My main conclusion in this chapter will be that much of what Olympiodorus and Damascius have to say about the difference between the civic and the purificatory life, and the philosophers who engage in them, suggests that they pursue different ends. Whether these different ends are ultimately compatible or not is a question they do not discuss at any length, but, by the evidence I shall produce, their attitude towards civic life seems ambivalent at best.

1.1. *The Civic Virtues and the Statesman*

Let us begin with the question of the civic virtues. Book IV of Plato's *Republic* contains an elaborate description of the virtues of the just city, which are concerned with the right relationships among three different classes. By analogy, the soul is also made virtuous by the relations that

obtain among different soul parts. Justice consists in each soul part fulfilling its proper task; courage is the preservation of reason's rule by the desiring part; wisdom the rule of reason over spirit and desire, and moderation the harmony of the three parts in their agreement that reason should rule (441e–442d). Yet the ancient tradition of Platonism did not consider the *Republic*'s account of virtue as Plato's final, or even most important, word on the matter.[1] Much more important to ancient Platonists is the characterization of virtue as 'likeness to god', a conception that Socrates sets out in a famous passage in the *Theaetetus* (176a–b). On this account, we must escape from this world to 'become like god'; but god is virtuous; therefore, by escaping from the world, we become truly virtuous.

I have sketched these two accounts of virtue with broad strokes, because they provide the background for Plotinus' influential attempt to define true virtue in relation to the virtues of book IV of the *Republic*. In *Enneads* I.2, Plotinus analyses the idea of 'likeness to god' in greater detail than we find in Plato, and concludes that the greatest likeness is obtained by cultivating the 'purificatory' virtues, whose main task it is to 'strip away' anything alien to the soul. Under this perspective, the civic virtues take a far off second place, as conducive to a likeness to good men rather than to god. Moreover, Plotinus' discussion, focused as it on the soul's relation to what is above and what is below it, makes no mention of the social or political significance of the civic virtues.[2] They are defined as 'measures in the soul as matter' (μέτρα γε ἐν ὕλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ; *Enn*. I.2.2.19), without ostensibly involving any form of engagement in the city or relations to others.

In Porphyry's restatement of his master's ethical doctrines in *Sentences* 32, on the other hand, the civic virtues are defined both in terms of their ability to moderate the passions and their significance for practical action in a community. The central passage describes them as follows:

> Αἱ μὲν τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ἐν μετριοπαθείᾳ κείμεναι τῷ ἕπεσθαι καὶ ἀκολουθεῖν τῷ λογισμῷ τοῦ καθήκοντος κατὰ τὰς πράξεις· διὸ πρὸς κοινωνίαν

[1] This point has been made with particular force and clarity by Annas (!999), who focuses mainly on the Middle Platonists.

[2] At *Rep*. IV.442d–443b, the just man is praised for passing the common tests of moral behaviour. Civic virtues thus enable just actions among citizens, a dimension not present in Plotinus' account. So rightly O'Meara (2003), 44: 'Plotinus is concerned with good order in the inner life of the soul, as defined in the *Republic*, neglecting, however, the outer order between citizens that Plato also describes in the *Republic* in terms of the cardinal virtues'.

> βλέπουσαι τὴν ἀβλαβῆ τῶν πλησίον ἐκ τοῦ συναγελασμοῦ καὶ τῆς κοινωνίας πολιτικαὶ λέγονται.
>
> The civic virtues, (i) based as they are on moderation of the passions, (ii) consist in following and going along with the process of reasoning relative to our duty in the field of practical action; hence since they have regard to a community of action which avoids doing harm to one's neighbours, they are called 'civic' by reason of their concern with gregariousness and community. (*Sent.* 32.5–10 Lamberz; tr. Dillon)

Note that Porphyry moves from the basic ethical feature of civic virtue, i.e. (i) moderation of the passions, to a much more extensive definition in terms of (ii) practical actions. We might think that Porphyry has good reason to connect these two ideas. After all, it is perhaps rather easy to slide from one to the other, inasmuch as a well-ordered soul would be a necessary condition for acquiring the dispositions of character that qualify their possessor for engagement in the life of a community. In addition, Porphyry connects 'civic virtue' specifically with the ability 'to follow and to go along with reasoning' about our duties in the sphere of action, and without proper control over one's impulses and desires, this ability would surely be compromised. Plato himself, in book IV of the *Republic*, assumes that justice in one's conduct towards others is a reflection of the kind of justice that exists as inner harmony in the soul and concerns one's true self (443c). Hence, the conclusion seems warranted that the 'civic virtues', even if they primarily concern the relation among soul parts, are not only compatible with practical action but in fact a prerequisite for it.

This immediately raises a problem for our enquiry into the meaning and place of 'civic virtue' in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*. Can we reasonably assume that Olympiodorus and Damascius retain this wider sense of the 'civic' which we find in Porphyry, where relationships with one's fellow citizens will feature prominently, or do they restrict its application to the moderation of the passions, i.e. the good ordering of soul parts, alone? In the introduction to their translation of Olympiodorus' *Gorgias Commentary*, Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant have argued that the concept of πολιτικὴ εὐδαιμονία is concerned primarily with the internal state of the soul and should be translated with 'constitutional well-being', i.e. well-being that derives from the good 'constitutional' order of the soul in regard to the passions, rather than with 'civic' or 'political well-being'.[3]

[3] Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant (1998), 30f.: 'this *politikê aretê* need not have anything in particular to do with *politics* or community life …'.

In the following, I suggest that while the 'civic virtues' in Olympiodorus and Damascius are primarily descriptive of a certain internal constitution within the soul, their significance reaches beyond that. In the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, the philosopher who posseses the civic virtues (the πολιτικός) is often characterised not simply as an individual with moderate desires, but also as someone who is involved in action and the affairs of the city much like an ideal Platonic philosopher-ruler. This should not be surprising. For reflection on political philosophy is alive and well in Neoplatonism, with the figure of the πολιτικός never far from the surface. A remark in Marinus' *Life of Proclus* tells us that late Neoplatonism had a variety of sources to construct a picture of the ideal 'statesman'. For, he says, Proclus had derived the civic virtues especially from the political writings of Aristotle, and Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*.[4] Marinus' remark is supported by Proclus' own texts, which display the influence of both Platonic and Aristotelian ideals of the statesman. To give but one salient example, Proclus' *Commentary on the Alcibiades* contains an extensive digression (181.5–185.20) on the ideal counsellor (σύμβουλος), who is 'an examiner of what is good and evil, beneficial and harmful' (185.17–19) in virtue of his practical wisdom. This ideal of the philosopher as a wise counsellor can be found in Aristotle, who argues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the chief goal of the statesman is to make his citizens good, which he achieves either in his capacity as founder and lawgiver (νομοθέτης) of the good city, or, once the city and its laws are instituted, in his capacity as wise counselor (σύμβουλος).[5] Moreover, Proclus describes how the ideal counsellor, in virtue of his capacity to receive a greater share of Intellect than his peers, joins together the divided masses into association and restores their condition of self-sufficiency. It may

[4] *Vita Procl.*14.1–3 Saffrey-Segonds: Καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰς πολιτικὰς προσελάμβανεν ἔκ τε τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους πολιτικῶν συγγραμμάτων καὶ τῶν παρὰ τῷ Πλάτωνι Νόμων τε καὶ Πολιτειῶν.

[5] Cf. Aristotle *NE* II.1.1103b3–4: 'legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator'. This definition is taken over by Olympiodorus, e.g. at *In Alc.* 225.25 Westerink. For the basic division of 'political science' into legislative and deliberative taken over by the later commentators (e.g. Ammonius *In Isag.* 15.12; Olympiodorus *In Gorg. passim*; Elias *In Isag.* 32.28 f., David *Prol.* 75.34–76.28), see *NE* VI.8.1141b24 ff.: 'Of the wisdom concerned with the city, the practical wisdom which plays a controlling part is legislative wisdom, while that which is related to this as particular to universal is known by the general name "political wisdom"; this has to do with action and deliberation, for a decree is a thing to be carried out in the form of an individual act (tr. Ross).'

not be too far-fetched to think that Proclus is giving a Platonic spin to Aristotle's discussion of kingship at *Pol.* 1288a15 ff., where the latter justifies kingly rule in cases where one individual far surpasses all others in virtue. For despite the likely influence of Aristotelian ideas, the passage from Proclus' *Commentary on the Alcibiades* must be seen in an overall Platonic context. The ideal counsellor, like the philosopher-king in the *Republic*, has as his chief function the task of allowing the many to share in the Good through him and his advice. As Proclus explains, he stands in the same relation to the many as the Good stands to Intellect: for just as the Good is one single principle for all things and brings forth Intellect, so the counsellor brings all men into communion with Intellect, offers them a share of good things and supplies practical wisdom to those who are deliberating.[6]

The political idealism of Proclus' *Commentary on the Alcibiades* is consistent with what evidence for reflection on the political life we find in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, and I will from now on translate ὁ πολιτικὸς with 'the statesman', rather than the weaker, and clumsier, 'the philosopher involved in civic life'. Before turning to the text themselves, however, a closer look at some old puzzles is in order.

1.2. *Old Puzzles*

The vexed question of the relation between civic and purificatory (and contemplative) ways of life merits some discussion, since it bears significantly on our understanding of the relevant parts of the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*. Aristotle, with his two contenders for the most complete life at *NE* X.7–8, had in many ways set the agenda for subsequent discussions.[7] Plotinus at times takes over Aristotle's dichotomy between action and contemplation almost unchanged; at *Enn.* I.2, he clearly states that we are to pursue the one true likeness to god through the virtues of purification, and not concern ourselves with mortal life. While civic virtues contain a certain 'trace' (ἴχνος; I.2.2.20) of the divine principle on account of their capacity to impose order and measure upon the soul, they also carry

[6] *In Alc.* 183.13–18.

[7] My comments here touch on the broader subject of the 'scale of virtues' doctrine in Neoplatonism. The scholarly literature on the subject is extensive; Schissel von Fleschenberg (1928) and Theiler (1929) already contain the main points. The best recent treatments by far are O'Meara, (2003) ch. 1.4, and Saffrey & Segonds (2001), LXIX–C. For a good collection of references, see Schissel von Fleschenberg (1928), 23.

the danger of leading us to imagine that soul itself is a god and all divinity like it (I.2.2.25). All involvements in the sphere of action—caring for children, marriage, but also noble actions, political interests and offices—are a kind of bewitchment (γοητεία) exerted by nature, pulling us deeper into the twilight realm of appearance and unreality (cf. IV.4.43.19f.: διὸ καὶ πᾶσα πρᾶξις γεγοήτευται καὶ πᾶς ὁ τοῦ πρακτικοῦ βίος). In the introductions to the *Categories* by the later Neoplatonists David and Elias, we can see, moreover, that the distinction between civic virtue on the one hand and purificatory (and contemplative) virtues on the other could be mapped onto the distinction between action and contemplation.[8]

Given that some Neoplatonic writers like Plotinus at times strike a dualistic tone that would suggest philosophy and civic life pull in very different directions, it is also true that this cannot be the last word on the matter. Iamblichus' *On the Pythagorean Life* and Marinus' *Life of Proclus* portray sages who are ostensibly able to act on different levels, fully capable of exercising their civic virtues without detriment to their contemplative achievements.[9] Moreover, the fate of the man of practical action and virtue in the afterlife is left peculiarly undecided by Plotinus, but taken up in more positive terms by the later Neoplatonists. At *Enn.* I.1.12.32ff., Plotinus allows Heracles' soul, distinguished by 'practical virtue' (πρακτικὴ ἀρετή), to rise to the gods while his shade (εἴδωλον) alone descends. The ambiguity that marks Heracles' fate after death seems to mirror the ambivalent nature of practical activity in the world, as a remote, if deceiving likeness of the intelligible world. With this concession to popular religion implicit in his nod towards the belief in shady εἴδωλα in Hades, however, Plotinus hardly solves the problem of how civic engagement could be said to have any value on his own terms, except as a very subordinate and rather suspect kind of activity.

In this light, it is interesting to note that the later commentators would agree with Plotinus that the man of active virtue, like Heracles, is worthy of ascent to the gods. However, the suggestion we find in Plotinus,

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[8] Cf. David *Prol.*77.20ff.

[9] The extent to which Iamblichus' *On the Pythagorean Life* (*VP*) is structured according to the 'degrees of virtue' theory is a matter of controversy. Von Albrecht (1966) has adduced some positive considerations, but on the whole the text speaks against it. Cf. Lurje (2002), 242ff. Nonetheless, it is clear that Iamblichus' Pythagoras does draw on the division of virtues into civic and contemplative, which is all that interests us here. See *VP* 157–240. For Proclus' exercise of the civic virtues, see Marinus *Vita Procl.* 14.1–17.31 Saffrey-Segonds.

that the man of practical virtue is torn apart into his immaterial soul and his material εἴδωλον, is not taken up by the later Neoplatonists to explain the place of civic life. Instead, by grading the process of attaining likeness to god as a process of likeness towards different gods in a divine hierarchy, their doctrine seems to be more open to a positive evaluation of political philosophy.[10] Proclus, for instance, claims that the lawgiver or the political philosopher *simpliciter* imitates the cosmic demiurge, surely no mean goal by itself (*In Remp*. I.247.15–17). Commenting on the concluding myth of the *Phaedo*, furthermore, Damascius assigns the 'true earth' as afterlife destination to those who have only habitual virtue, while heaven and the realm beyond it are reserved for those with civic and contemplative virtue (Dam.I.551).

Moreover, the Neoplatonists are in agreement that possession of higher virtues presupposes possession of lower virtues, but the exact manner in which the latter are exercised by the sage is barely discussed. This being the case, there are a number of ways we can conceptualize Neoplatonic civic engagement along compatibilist lines:

(i) Civic engagement on the part of the true philosopher is a *necessary evil*. Just as the physician does not want people to be sick so that he can exercise his craft, the philosopher only engages in civic life if he must.[11]

(ii) Civic engagement on the part of the true philosopher is a *necessary good*. For the philosopher, participation in the Good necessarily means transmitting it to lower levels. In a cosmic version of Plato's return-to-the-cave scenario, some select individuals like Socrates have been sent down to help others in the ascent, as part of the order of Providence.[12] Since bad constitutional arrangements will be detrimental to the salvific prospects of souls, the philosopher will attempt to help his fellow human beings on the ascent where it would otherwise be hindered by faulty civic structures.

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[10] Baltzly (2004) traces the idea of 'likeness to god' in Proclus' *Timaeus Commentary*, and suggests that because (i) the gods possess virtue and (ii) virtue has a constant universal character across different levels of reality, 'to the extent that these [*sc*. divine] virtues are higher forms of the very ones that Platonists associate with right action within the world of human affairs, there is no flight from this world in our return to the divine' (311). See also Dam.I.119 for assimilation to different gods according to the different levels of virtue.

[11] Cf. Alcinous *Did*. 3.1–5 Louis/153.25–30 Hermann; Plotinus, *Enn*. VI.8.5.13 ff.

[12] See for example the opening of Hermias' *Phaedrus Commentary*.

(iii) Direct civic engagement is not to be sought, but *indirect influence on others* is commendable. The Epicurean dictum 'live unnoticed' is cited by Marinus to describe the nature of Proclus' role as philosophical adviser of statesmen.[13]

(iv) Civic engagement on the part of the statesman is *different* (= is the result of a different state of mind) from civic engagement on the part of the true philosopher.[14] The sage may exercise lower virtues as circumstances require, but not as the main focus of his activity.[15]

From the above options it seems that Neoplatonism has ample resources for making the case that the civic and the philosophical ideals of life are in some sense compatible. Attempts to find a similar doctrine in Plotinus have resulted in some fruitful discussions, but unfortunately our *Commentaries on the Phaedo* hardly bear on this very pressing issue.[16] Nevertheless, the basic problem, how the two levels of civic and purificatory virtue, the statesman and the true philosopher, relate, is highly relevant to what follows. Can civic and philosophical ways of life co-exist under the dualist perspective of Plato's *Phaedo*?

2. *The Civic Context(s) of Plato's* Phaedo

As an introduction to the commentators' approach to this section of the *Phaedo*, we may consider the difference between Socrates' defence in the *Apology* and that in the *Phaedo*. The former, acted out in the law-courts of Athens, is evidently tied up with life in the city, while the death-scene of the *Phaedo* is surely intended to take us beyond the sphere of civic life. Instead of confrontations with sophists or Athenian elites, we have

[13] Cf. Marinus, *Vita Proc.* 15.29–32 Saffrey-Segonds, and Van den Berg (2005).

[14] Option (iv) may also be suggested by *Rep.* 520b–d, where the philosopher-ruler's descent to the cave is justified by his ability to work in both the civic and the intellectual sphere, with the crucial difference that he has no desire to rule, and hence is most able to rule justly.

[15] The thought that lower virtues are to be exercised κατὰ περίστασιν plays an important role in Plotinus (cf. *Enn.* I.2.7.21), and is picked up by Porphyry *Sent.* 32.80–82: οὐκέτι μέντοι τῷ ἔχειν καὶ τὰς ἐλάττους [viz. τὰς ἀρετάς] ὁ ἔχων τὰς μείζους ἐνεργήσει κατὰ τὰς ἐλάττους προηγουμένως, ἀλλὰ μόνον κατὰ περίστασιν τῆς γενέσεως ('yet whoever has the higher virtues will not, by reason of also having the lower virtues, act predominantly in accordance with the lower ones, but only according to the circumstances of the world of generation'). See also Psellus *De omn. doctr.* 70.10–13.

[16] On Plotinus' ethical position, see Remes (2006).

here an intimate discussion in a small circle of followers. Having failed to convince the Athenian judges of his innocence, Socrates attempts a second defence before his friends at *Phd*. 63b–69e, who are still troubled by the idea that 'philosophy is a pursuit of death'. If the gods really are our guardians, how can it be rational to desire escaping from their care?

The progression from the first, 'political' defence of the *Apology* to that in the *Phaedo* is a structuring device which is hinted at in Plato's text itself. Socrates refers to Simmias and Cebes as his 'judges' (*Phd*. 63e8), whom he hopes to persuade with greater success than his Athenian judges (69e3 f.), clearly referring to his earlier trial. Olympiodorus and Damascius offer a number of interesting comments on the relation between the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*. According to them, for example, the trial of the *Apology* was concerned with the 'civic life' of Socrates, while that of the *Phaedo* deals with the 'purificatory' (Ol.8.18 and Dam.I.36; 174). Since the purificatory way of life brings with it a greater degree of accuracy, being concerned with the forms in the soul,[17] Socrates' defence in the *Phaedo* succeeds; conversely, since civic affairs are less clear, their level of probability and persuasive force is lesser, accounting for his failure in the *Apology* (Ol.8.18.5). While Socrates' earlier defence was concerned with the preservation of his physical organism, now his separate life 'that is truly his own' (ἡ οἰκεῖα ζωή), i.e. his soul by itself alone, is at stake (Dam.I.174.4).

However, the *Apology* is not the only 'political' text that stands in the background of Socrates' second defence. As we have seen in the introduction to this study, the Platonic curriculum established by Iamblichus places the *Gorgias*, which supposedly contains Plato's teaching on the civic virtues, before the *Phaedo*.[18] The *Phaedo*, on the other hand, is to help the student overcome the earlier, civic mode of life and advance him on the road to contemplation. The pedagogical method of integrating individual Platonic dialogues into a larger interpretative framework, based on the progression towards philosophical wisdom, has interesting consequences. The opposition between politics and purification in the *Phaedo* is one such example of hermeneutical 'spillage' of one dialogue (the *Gorgias*) onto another (the *Phaedo*). As a result, the radical

[17] The significance of the forms of the soul to the purificatory way of life will only become more fully apparent in the commentators' discussion of the recollection argument and the argument from affinity (see chs. 4.4 and 5.6 below).

[18] See above, 18–19.

confrontation between the philosopher and the non-philosopher that appears dominant in much of Plato's early political philosophy is turned into a confrontation between the *statesman* and the philosopher. Thus, the evidence from the *Phaedo* commentaries suggests a sustained effort to define the civic against the purificatory way of life. As an illustration, we may consider the following passage from Plato's *Phaedo*, the concluding speech of Socrates' defence:

> And it may well be that those persons to whom we owe the institution of mystery-rites are not to be despised, inasmuch as they have in fact long ago hinted at the truth by declaring that all such as arrive in Hades uninitiated shall lie in mud, while he that comes there purified and initiated shall dwell with the gods. For truly, as their authorities tell us, there are 'many that carry the thyrsus, but Bacchants few are amongst them'; where by 'Bacchants' I understand them to mean simply those who have pursued philosophy aright. (tr. Hackforth, slightly modified; *Phd*. 69c–d)

Compare this to Olympiodorus' comments on the same passage:

> Another distinction he [*sc*. Plato] makes [*sc*. between civic and purificatory virtues] is that civic virtues are not connected to mystic rites (οὐκ εἰσὶ τελεστικαί), but purificatory and contemplative virtues are. This is the reason why they are named as such: 'purificatory' from the purifications we use in mystic rites, 'contemplative' from the contemplation of divine things. This is why Plato […] says 'the thyrsus bearers are many, but Bacchants few are amongst them', meaning by those who carry the thyrsus without becoming Bacchants[19] statesmen (οἱ πολιτικοὶ), while those who carry the thyrsus and have become Bacchants are philosophers on the way to purification. (Ol.8.6.13–7.8 [7.1–3 omitted]; tr. Westerink, modified)

Note here how Olympiodorus can shift without warning from discussing the civic virtues to reflection about the statesman a few lines later. One might wish to object that while a paradigmatic statesman will certainly possess the civic virtues, not everyone who posseses these virtues in some degree will also be a statesman.[20] However, the present passage shows that the two terms 'civic virtues' and 'the statesman' when they occur in opposition to higher levels of virtue and activity can be used virtually interchangeably by Olympiodorus.

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[19] Westerink acutely remarks that for Olympiodorus and Damascius, the philosopher who trains himself in Bacchic rites can be called not only a Bacch*ant*, but also a Bacch*us*. In so far as the philosopher at the level of purification has become like the god, he also shares his name (Dam.I.171.3). Cf. also Ol.8.7.7.

[20] I am grateful to the anonymous reader of my draft manuscript for alerting me to this problem.

In the quoted passage, what appears as a harsh judgement on the fate of the uninitiated non-philosophers is turned into a judgment on the 'statesmen', i.e. those philosophers who involve themselves in some way in civic life (we have yet to see what specific forms their involvement might take). If we understand, as the Neoplatonists do, the reference to those who have 'popular and civic' virtue at *Phd*. 82a10–b1 as referring to the virtues of the embodied soul at *Republic* IV, the thought of placing the civic virtues with the non-philosophers is perhaps less strange than it seems at first. Under the perspective of the *Phaedo*, these civic virtues are 'without philosophy or reason' (82a1), as distinguished from the virtue of the philosopher who despises the senses and has his soul gather itself within itself (82d–83c). The implications of this step for the Neoplatonist evaluation of civic engagement could be significant. If we include the statesman among the uninitiated, the gap between him and the true philosopher would appear very difficult to bridge, casting some doubt on the possibility of civic engagement on the part of the Neoplatonist.

Thus, while the view that a debate between civic life and purification takes place in the *Phaedo* may go beyond the surface meaning of individual passages, it raises interesting questions. On what criteria do the commentators attempt to demarcate the sphere of the political? How does their peculiar interpretation affect readings of other passages? And, to come back to the basic problem of this chapter, can we reconcile the dualism of the *Phaedo* with some more positive evaluation of civic life?

3. *The Discourses on Purification*

The *Phaedo* commentaries divide Socrates' defence speech into three sections, each one of them a καθαρτικὸς λόγος, a discourse on purification, which I will discuss in turn. (i) The first discourse on purification (64d2–65a8) brings out the philosopher's indifference to bodily pleasures and adornments of the body; (ii) the second (65a9–65d3) portrays the body as an obstacle in the acquisition of wisdom; (iii) the third (65d4–66a10) finally claims that there are objects—forms—which cannot be apprehended through bodily channels. The place of the 'discourses on purification' in the larger argument of the first part of the *Phaedo* can be illustrated by the following schema based on Ol.3.2; Dam.I.49; 56:

Hypothetical syllogism

If the philosopher pursues death, he will not be afraid to face it.
He pursues death.
Therefore he will not be afraid to face it.

|

Categorical syllogism

Separation of body and soul is death.
The philosopher strives to separate himself from the body {discourses on purification}
Therefore the philosopher pursues death.

According to this schema, the main argument of Socrates' defence is constituted by a hypothetical syllogism. Socrates proves the major premise, that the philosopher will not be afraid of death when it comes, by pointing out that it is foolish to pursue a thing without wanting to obtain it. In this respect, remarks Olympiodorus, the pursuit of death is unlike other activities that are complete in themselves, such as prayer: the philosopher aims at a state of 'being dead' (in the sense of a complete extinction of affects and a complete separation of the soul from the body), not a continuous practice of dying (Ol.3.2.6–3.3.6).

The minor premise of the hypothetical syllogism ('the philosopher pursues death') is itself demonstrated by a categorical syllogism of the form X = Y, Z = X, so Z = Y. Socrates' three discourses on purification have the function of establishing the minor premise of the categorical syllogism ('the philosopher strives to eparate himself from the body') and therefore occupy a central role in the entire argument. The definition of death as the separation of body and soul, finally, functions as the middle term in the categorical syllogism.

The beginning of Socrates' defence at *Phd*. 63e8 introduces the first 'discourse on purification': 'I wish now to explain to you, my judges, the reason why I think a man who has really spent his life in philosophy (ἀνὴρ τῷ ὄντι ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίψας) is naturally of good courage when he is about to die …'. According to Olympiodorus, the use of τῷ ὄντι in the phrase 'the man who has really spent his life in philosophy' is to be understood as distinguishing the philosopher from the statesman. The passage in which our commentator explains this particular reading is interesting enough to quote here:

> For the dialogue deals with purification (καθαρτικὸς γὰρ ὁ διάλογος); the statesman, however, is not a philosopher in the strict sense (κυρίως), because at the appropriate moment (ἐν καιρῷ) he will make use of the

> affects anger and desire, too: anger to defend his country against its enemies, and desire because he is concerned also with the body and the world of generation; for we have not come to be for our own sake, but for that of the universe as well. (Ol.3.6.4–8)

The passage requires some explanation. Why does the statesman use anger and desire, and given that he does, why should it disqualify him from being a philosopher 'in the strict sense' (κυρίως)? The phrase 'at the appropriate moment' (ἐν καιρῷ) indicates that the statesman will be able to use the irrational elements in his soul to serve his city when the need arises, e.g. when using anger to fend off enemies. With this exegesis of the passage, Olympiodorus places himself in opposition to Harpocration, who thinks Socrates is making a distinction between the sophist, who merely pretends to be a philosopher, and the true philosopher. By itself, the text would not allow us to judge either way, although perhaps we may wish to side with Harpocration.[21] But according to the two structuring principles outlined above, i.e. that a progression takes place (i) from the *Apology* to the *Phaedo*, and (ii) from the *Gorgias* to the *Phaedo*, Socrates' second defence speech becomes 'politicized', and so specifically opposes civic life to the life of contemplation. The reason Olympiodorus gives for ruling out Harpocration's suggestion states that it is 'far from Plato's greatness of conception' (πόρρω τῆς Πλάτωνος μεγαλονοίας; Ol.3.6.3), presumably because it misses the deeper point that the philosopher engaged in political life, though superficially similar to the real philosopher, cannot attain the true heights of contemplation.[22] The complaint against Harpocration, then, would be his closeness to the text, at the expense of seeing the greater context of Socrates' second defence.

We have yet to see why the statesman is different from the true philosopher in his attitude to pleasure, which, we remember, is the subject of the first discourse on purification. Happily, Olympiodorus elucidates this point in his next lecture (lecture four) on the second discourse on purification, which is concerned with the philosopher's acquisition

[21] Cf. Dillon (1971) for comments on the fragments of Harpocration's generally common-sensical exegesis. Gioè (2002), 459 makes the interesting point that 'l'identità del vero filosofo costituiva per i Medioplatonici uno dei temi centrali del Fedone', citing Albinus *Isag.* 5.20–21 and Atticus fr. 44 des Places in support of his claim.

[22] On the principle that the loftiest interpretation is truest to Plato (provided it does not contradict the text), see my discussion of the interpretative goal of the *Phaedo* (Introduction 3.1).

of wisdom. He recapitulates the main differences between the statesman and the philosopher in the following terms:

> The statesman is concerned also with pleasure and pain, for he especially pays attention to the body as an instrument, and he does not have as his aim freedom from emotions, but their moderation (τέλος αὐτοῦ οὐχ ἡ ἀπάθεια ἀλλ᾽ ἡ μετριοπάθεια); but the philosophers in pursuit of purification and contemplation are mindful of the body as a talkative neighbour, to prevent it from hindering their activities with its nonsense, and they have as their aim freedom from emotions. (Ol.4.3.12–16)

Two claims are made in this passage, (i) that the statesman uses the body as an instrument and is hence concerned with pleasure and pain, and (ii) that he aims at moderation of affects. We have already encountered the claim that the statesman cannot attain complete freedom from the emotions; the new element here is (i), his involvement with pleasure and pain.[23] Most likely, the view that the statesman must take into account pleasure and pain is connected to the idea that any kind of practical action is in some way tied to the body. The definition of the statesman as someone who is using the body as an instrument, in opposition to the philosophers dedicated to purification or contemplation who completely disregard the body, derives from the late Neoplatonic exegesis of Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades*.[24] Thus, the statesman will not see pleasure and pain as things to be chosen or avoided in themselves, but merely as means to the nobler ends (such as defending his city) he pursues.[25]

When Olympiodorus goes on to explain the philosopher's willingness to die in relation to his contempt for the senses, he makes the further point that the statesman will need to have knowledge of the irrational soul parts in order to rule over the different classes of the ideal Platonic city, i.e. the guardians, soldiers and labourers. Our commentator's

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[23] For the dispute between the Peripatetic ideal of 'moderation of affects' (*metriopatheia*) and the Stoic 'extinction of affects' (*apatheia*) as contenders for the goal of ethical living, see Dillon (1983). See also Pophyry *Sent.* 32, with commentary by Luc Brisson and Jean-Marie Flamand in Brisson (2005), 628–642.

[24] See Olympiodorus *In Alc.* 4.19 (μόνος δὲ ὁ πολιτικὸς ὀργάνῳ κέχρηται τῷ σώματι κτλ); 142.15; 177.15. The point that practical life can only be pursued through the body is already made by Alcinous *Did.* 2.2.8–9 Louis/153.12–13 Hermann.

[25] Cf. Dam.I.68, a passage which discusses the objection that indifference towards pleasure cannot be the defining mark of the true philosopher, since this characteristic will be shared also by those who have moral and civic virtues, who do not pursue pleasure for its own sake either.

discussion takes as its starting-point the general principle that the soul has a threefold activity, (i) turning towards lower things, and apprehending sensible things; (ii) turning towards itself, and apprehending the principles of all things that are within itself; (iii) lifting itself up to the intelligibles by contemplating the ideas (Ol.4.2). But rather than assigning each different mode in the soul's activity to those engaged in politics, purification and contemplation respectively, Olympiodorus takes a more sophisticated approach. For if the knowledge of, say, the philosopher engaged in contemplation would not include, and not even relate to, knowledge of the sensible world or of the principles within the soul, then no one would be a 'true philosopher', because the knowledge of each philosopher would be partial and unrelated to lower and higher kinds of knowledge.

Thus, while the different kinds of philosophers all have knowledge of sensible objects, the particular form which this knowledge takes differs. The philosopher involved in contemplation, for example, has a better grasp of intelligible reality than the statesman, and will therefore know sensibles in a more unified way than his humbler colleague. Conversely, however, the statesman too can revert upon himself and turn towards the principles beyond his soul to arrange affairs in the city:

> The statesman orders the visible world in accordance with the reason-principles within himself (κατὰ τοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ λόγους) by directing his gaze upon his soul: upon reason to appoint the guardians; upon spirit, the soldiers; upon desire, the labourers; but he also leads the guardians upwards to the Good through education, so that he must have knowledge of all three [*sc*. activities of the soul]. (Ol.4.3.1–6)

That each part of the soul has its equivalent in the different classes of the *Republic* follows from the analogy between city and soul maintained throughout the dialogue. Since instituting the good city also involves educating the guardian class, the statesman must have a grasp of the Good. In this brief sketch, Olympiodorus sets out an ideal of the statesman as a law-giver much like Socrates and Glaucon in the *Republic*. The fundamental difference between the statesman and the philosopher, according to Olympiodorus in the passage quoted just above, lies not in their souls' activities as such, but rather in their relative 'fields' of engagement. The statesman is concerned with intra-mundane matters, while the philosopher on the path of purification is concerned with the supra-mundane, and the contemplator with the intellective (Ol.8.3.5–6).

It is in the third discourse on purification, finally, that the difference between the statesman and the true philosopher also appears at a cognitive level, according to a principle established by Iamblichus:[26]

> There is another difference between the statesman and the others: he draws his conclusions from a universal major premise based on reflection and from a particular minor, because he uses the body as an instrument and is therefore concerned with actions, and actions are particular, and the particular is individual, so that the statesman depends on one particular premise for his conclusions. With those engaged in purification and contemplation it is different: they are concerned with universal forms (τὰ καθόλου εἴδη). (Ol.4.4.1–8; tr. Westerink)

Thus, while the statesman acts on the basis of universal principles, he will have to make decisions on whether particular instances fall under the general principle. The kind of virtue that pertains to the statesman's reasoning is φρόνησις or practical wisdom, which combines knowledge of universals and particulars into a conclusion concerned with action.[27] As an elucidation of the *Phaedo*, the commentary seems to have come a long way from the text at 65a9–d3. The θεωρία about the difference between the statesman and the philosopher in lecture four of Olympiodorus' commentary, however, makes sense if read in light of the assumptions sketched out in my introduction. If Socrates' second defence signifies a dramatic progression beyond the political, we would expect to find a clear distinction made in the three discourses between the political and the purificatory (and contemplative) ways of life.

4. *The Virtues*

The opposition between politics and purification is prominent in Olympiodorus' exegesis of *Phd.* 68c5–69e5, where the subject of the nature of virtue is raised.[28] Since this stretch of argument is rather intricate, I will reproduce the central section here, in order to help us appreciate the commentator's exegetical finesse:

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[26] Cf. Ammonius *In de int.* 135.19ff., reporting Iamblichean doctrine (cf. *ibid.* l. 14: κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θείου Ἰαμβλίχου ὑφήγησιν).

[27] On the role of practical wisdom (φρόνησις) in Neoplatonic political philosophy, see also O'Meara (2003), 136f. See also Ol.4.11.1–6.

[28] On various difficulties with the exchange-passage that I cannot pursue here, see Gallop (1975), 98–103; Bostock (1986), 30–35; Rowe (1993), 146–152.

> Yes, my dear good Simmias; (i) for I fancy that this is not the right way to exchange things for virtue, that exchanging of pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains, fears for fears, small ones for great and great ones for small, as though they were coins; no, there is, I suggest, only one right sort of coin for which we ought to exchange all these things, and that is intelligence (φρόνησις) and if all our buying and selling is done for intelligence and with its aid, then we have (iv) real courage, real temperance, real justice; and (iv) true virtue in general is that which is accompanied by intelligence, no matter whether pleasure and fears and all the rest of such things be added or subtracted. But to keep these apart from intelligence and merely exchange them for each other results, I fear, (iii) in a sort of illusory façade (σκιαγραφία τις) of virtue, (ii) veritably fit for slaves, destitute of all sound substance and truth; whereas (v) true virtue, whether it be of temperance, of justice, or of courage, is in fact a purging of all such things, intelligence itself being a sort of purge. (*Phd*. 68c5–69e5, tr. Hackforth)

On the face of it, the passage opposes two kinds of virtues: one with 'intelligence' (φρόνησις), one without. The presence of 'intelligence' in some way perfects the virtues, its absence degrades them to illusions fit for slaves. Presumably, the point here is one about motivation: the mere exchange of pleasure for pleasure without any point of reference in 'intelligence' is equivalent to being enslaved by bodily desires. On the other hand, if the standard of reference lies in the virtue of the soul, 'intelligence', true virtue results. In what precedes, Socrates had already defined the virtues of true courage and true temperance in terms of their opposition to the body, and contrasted them with the virtues of the merely continent man, who faces fear out of greater fears and abstains from pleasure for the sake of greater pleasures (68c–d).

The general strategy of *Phd*. 68c5–69e5 according to Damascius and Olympiodorus consists in gradually working upwards through the different ranks of virtues. Rather than seeing a simple opposition between two kinds of virtue, they read a number of subtle distinctions into the passage. Most interesting for our purposes is the fact that the commentators also find a reference to the civic virtues of Plato's *Republic* here. As Damascius tells us,

> Plato's goal is to completely separate the purifying virtues and truly to purify them from all the lower virtues, not only from virtues 'by a false name' (τῶν ψευδωνύμων), as Harpocration thinks, but also from the 'illusory' ones (τῶν ἐσκιαγραφημένων), i.e. natural and ethical virtues, and not from these only, but also from the perfect civic virtues. (Dam.I.147.1–4)

Instead of assuming that the virtues 'by a false name' (which I have labelled with (i) in the *Phaedo* passage quoted above) have to be identical

with (ii) slavish and (iii) illusory virtue, though, Proclus assigns these to different degrees of virtue. Slavish virtues are natural virtues, with which even slaves are endowed. Ethical virtues constitute an 'illusory facade of virtue', because they do not know the *why* (διότι), only the *that* (ὅτι), since they are acquired by habituation, not by reasoning.[29] Virtues 'by a false name' differ from natural and moral virtue in that they pretend to be what they are not, unlike natural or moral virtues who simply are in the same way as God or Nature are. Nor are the virtues 'by a false name' identical with the civic virtues, since the latter aim persistently at the good, not greater pleasure (Ol.8.5.3–8.6.6). Most interesting for our purposes is what Proclus has to say about the last class of virtues, which feature at (iv), as 'real courage, real temperance, real justice' as well as 'true virtue in general which is accompanied by intelligence'. The purpose of the passage, as we have seen, is to set apart the purificatory virtues at (v) from all lower virtues, including the civic ones. The differences between the two are as follows:

> (i) Civic virtues make use of the tripartite soul, purificatory and contemplative virtues do not; (ii) civic virtues are 'really' (τῷ ὄντι; cf. *Phd.* 69b2) virtues and 'true' (ἀληθεῖς; 69b3) virtues, but not both together, 'really true' (τῷ ὄντι ἀληθεῖς) virtues, as purificatory and contemplative virtues are; just as in the *Alcibiades* Plato called the soul the 'self' (αὐτὸ), but the rational soul 'the soul itself' (τὸ αὐτὸ), in the same way he now calls the civic virtues 'real' virtues only, and purificatory and contemplative virtues 'really true' virtues; (iii) Another distinction he [Plato] makes [*sc.* between civic and purificatory virtues] is that civic virtues are not connected to mystic rites (οὐκ εἰσὶ τελεστικαί), but purificatory and contemplative virtues are. This is the reason why they are named as such: 'purificatory' from the purifications we use in mystic rites, 'contemplative' from the contemplation of divine things. (Ol.8.6.6 ff.; tr. Westerink, modified)

Olympiodorus' comments nicely summarize the Neoplatonic ambivalence towards the civic virtues. On the one hand, they deal with reason's command over the different soul parts, a rather low end in the scale of philosophic achievement. Nonetheless, they have the status of 'real' and 'true' virtue, even though they still lack a degree of perfection that is possessed by the higher virtues. Point (iii) in the passage cited adds a new dimension to our exploration: civic virtues 'are not con-

[29] Cf. Ol.8.4.2–3. The language in which the ethical virtues are described here echoes Aristotle *NE* 1095b7, although the doctrine itself, with its strict separation of reasoning from habituation, is no very close reflection of Aristotle's, and more reminiscent of Plato's 'popular and civic virtue' at *Phd.* 82a11–b3, as Westerink (1976), n. *ad* Ol.8.2–3 notes.

nected to mystic rites' as the higher virtues are. Here, finally, we have an explanation as to why the statesman is a thyrsus-bearer rather than a Bacchant: the perfection of the virtues is achieved through initiation. Is this a metaphor for some higher philosophical insight, or is Olympiodorus taking Socrates' Orphic references as hinting that purification in the fullest sense needs to involve some components of religious ritual?

Whether Olympiodorus has in mind specifc Orphic rituals that would reinforce the moral lessons of the *Phaedo* is difficult to say on the strength of our evidence, although it is worth pointing out Marinus' report that Proclus was extremely conscientious about observing ritual purifications in his daily life.[30] There can be little doubt, moreover, that Olympiodorus and Damascius are emphatic about the importance of Orphic lore. If we have seen that Olympiodorus thinks mystic rites are instrumental in turning the soul away from involvement with the body and the temporal world, we find the same thought expressed in a poignant formula at Ol.8.7.2 f.: 'initiation is the rapture of virtues' (τελετὴ γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τῶν ἀρετῶν βακχεία).

Interestingly, there is some evidence that the text of the *Phaedo* could itself be seen as constituting something like an initiation through divine riddles and symbolic utterances (Dam.I.165), turning us away from the Dionysiac life to that of the Titans, only to finally return to the undivided life of Dionysus. If the Orphic account of the Titanic dismemberment of Dionysus at *Phd*. 61c–62b, which we encounter in the context of Socrates' prohibition on suicide, did not add very much by way of philosophical argument, our encountering it again at 69c3–d2 is supposed to reveal how the Platonic dialogue mimics the perpetual movement of souls from guilt and descent to salvation and return to the source (Ol.8.7; Dam.I.165–166). While the philosophers in pursuit of purification and contemplation are raised up again as *Bacchoi*, the statesman has not fully left the Titanic mode of life where the 'deep division' between 'mine and thine' prevails (Ol.8.7.6–7). The contrast between the realm of civic life characteristic of the Titanic element in humans and the higher life of Dionysus here looks unsurprisingly otherworldly, and it would seem, in conclusion, that the commentators' evaluation of civic life is ambivalent at best.

[30] Cf. Marinus *Vita Procl*. 18.21–35 Saffrey-Segonds.

We have thus reached the end of the first part of this study, which has been concerned with right and wrong ways of understanding Socrates' injunction to run after him into that other world. Next, we will consider how Neoplatonic interpreters made sense of three arguments for the immortality of the soul.

CHAPTER THREE

SYRIANUS AND DAMASCIUS: TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ARGUMENT FROM OPPOSITES IN PLATO'S *PHAEDO* (*PHD*. 69E–72D)

1. *Introduction*

We have seen in chapter two how our commentators divide Socrates' second defence speech into three different discourses on purification. According to Damascius, each of these discourses is analogous to one of the arguments from immortality (Dam.I.66). The argument from opposites corresponds to the first discourse on purification, which had argued that the philosopher despises physical pleasure; the argument from recollection to the second, where sense-perception had emerged as an obstacle to the knowledge of reality; and the argument from affinity to the last discourse demonstrating that the objects of knowledge are apprehended by thought alone. For our commentator, then, there is a close connection between Socrates' description of the philosopher's way of life and the first three arguments for immortality. The first discourse on purification and the argument from opposites are analogous because both demonstrate that the soul is independent and separable from the body; in a moral sense, by resisting pleasure; and in a physical sense, by being the constant element that underlies the change from opposite to opposite when the body perishes. In the case of the arguments from recollection and from affinity, the correspondence with Socrates' speeches is readily apparent. The recollection argument expands on the idea that knowledge of reality cannot derive from sense-perception, and the argument from affinity capitalizes on the close kinship between the soul by itself and the objects of knowledge.

In this chapter, I will consider how Syrianus and Damascius made sense of the logic that underlies Socrates' first argument for the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo*. Since there is little agreement among modern commentators on what the argument is designed to prove and on its supposed faults or validity, I will begin by drawing out some of the salient issues of interpretation from the relevant stretch of text (69e–72d).

The argument takes its starting point from Cebes' objection to Socrates' 'second defence' of the philosopher's way of life. According to Socrates, only the philosopher who has risen above ordinary morality may dwell with the gods, where he will find good rulers and friends. The 'blessed hope' (καλὴ ἔλπις) (70a8) for afterlife felicity that concludes Socrates' defence brings Cebes into action: surely, objects he, argument and proof are required to show that when a man is dead his soul still exists and has 'power and intelligence' (δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ φρόνησιν) (70b1–4). The soul may, after all, perish just like 'a breath or smoke' (ὥσπερ πνεῦμα ἢ καπνὸς) (70a5) when it departs from the body, as the many fear.

Cebes, then, demands above all proof of the soul's continued existence after death (understood as the separation of soul and body). At this point, Socrates introduces an 'ancient doctrine' (παλαιὸς λόγος) (70c6), according to which the souls of the dead go to Hades from the world of the living, and return again to the living from Hades.[1] The truth of this proposition, that the souls of the dead exist in Hades, depends on the truth of another: only if 'the living' come to be from 'the dead' do our souls continue to exist in Hades (70c8–d1). For if the living come to be from the dead, the soul must somehow always already be there ('exist in Hades') to make the change from dead to living possible.[2]

All of this needs some more exploration. There is, first of all, a natural objection to the view that living things come to be from dead ones, namely that they do not, at least not in the way in which Socrates intends. Crucial to Socrates' argument is the law of opposites, which states that 'whatever has an opposite will come about (γίγνεσθαι) from its opposite and from it only' (70e4–6). If the change from one opposite to the other took place in only one direction, for instance from the living to the dead, and not vice versa, then nature would become 'lame', that is to say, the continual process of change that we can observe in our world would come

[1] The 'ancient doctrine' is variously held to be Pythagorean (Tert. *de anima* 28), Orphic (Ol.10.3.9ff.), Egyptian (Albinus, *apud* Tert. *de anima* 28), or Plato's own invention.

[2] There is a difficult question here: is Socrates' argument about living and dead things, persons or souls? I take it that Socrates is attempting to argue that if 'the living' and the 'dead' proceed from each other, there must be souls in Hades to ensoul them. 'The living' and 'the dead' could include anything that shows the presence or absence of life, such as plants and animals. Yet Socrates does repeatedly talk about 'our' souls, so that the argument ought to be about living and dead *persons* primarily. In order to avoid prejudging my exposition, however, I deliberately reproduce the vagueness of Plato's Greek.

to a halt. But the consequence is absurd; therefore the antecedent must be false. If, then, the law of opposites truly holds for all of generation, the living must come to be from the dead also, or else everything would end up being dead. There are two main issues here, of which only the second is of real relevance. Firstly, is the law of change from opposite to opposite something we can accept as plausible? And secondly, does the 'change' from dead to being alive fall under this law, whether it is true or not? I believe the answer to both questions is negative.

As far as the general law of change is concerned, we must first decide on the sense of 'opposite' in question. Socrates' first two examples of opposites are the fine and the base, and the just and the unjust (70e3). Since he is committed to the claim that all things that have an opposite come to be from their opposite only, Socrates would also have to commit himself to the further claim that the just proceeds from the unjust, and the fine from the base. But this last claim cannot be true. Some opposites like the fine and the base are polar contraries, opposites on extreme ends of a continuous scale. It makes sense, for example, to talk of something as more or less fine, and to describe the least fine as base. Yet something can become fine without having been base before; therefore there is no necessity of a cyclical change from opposite to opposite in the case of polar contraries.[3]

What about Socrates' other examples of opposites? Another class of properties Socrates mentions are relatives, such as greater and smaller (70e10), weaker and stronger; slower and quicker; better and worse; more just and more unjust (71a2–3). Relatives are not proper contraries; there is no contradiction involved in someone's being greater (than Smith) but also smaller (than Jones). From Socrates' exposition at 70e10 ff., we can see, however, that the focus of the argument is on processes of change (x's becoming greater or smaller) that result in contrary states (x's being great or small); thus, x's becoming greater from T^1 to T^2 will bring about its being great (at T^2) in relation to what it was before (at T^1). Conversely, at the beginning of the process (at T^1), x would have been small in relation to its greatness at the end of the process (at T^2).

So perhaps all Socrates needs for his argument is the thought that whatever is greater than before must have been smaller than it is now, and *vice versa*. As long as 'being greater' and 'being smalller' are conversely

[3] A point well made by Barnes (1978), 405: 'not all just men rise from an initial state of depravity; and not all beautiful swans were once ugly ducklings'.

related to the same subject undergoing a process of change, this requirement is met. But this is to say something very different from Socrates' general law that every opposite comes to be from its own opposite alone. For in the case of something becoming greater or smaller, the only relevant opposites are a particular class of relative properties that proceed on a gradual scale.[4]

If Socrates' principle can stand, therefore, it is severely limited in its application, and of no use at all for allaying Cebes' worry that the soul may be dispersed after death. First of all, being alive and being dead are not ordinarily used as relative properties on a gradual scale. A man is either dead or alive, but not 'more' or 'less dead', unless perhaps metaphorically. Yet it seems that Socrates requires precisely this use of life and death for his argument. He himself uses the example of being awake and being asleep as an analogy with being dead and alive. Just as there are two processes of falling asleep and waking up that link together the states of being asleep and being awake, there are two processes that take place between life and death, from life to death (dying) and from death to life (coming to life again). So perhaps one could imagine a sense in which Socrates' principle of change between relative properties could be extended to life and death. A new-born child (with a longer lifespan potentially ahead of it) might be 'more alive' than an adult in the midst of life, and an old man 'less alive' (or even 'more dead') than a sprightly youth.

Yet Socrates' analogy between being asleep/being awake and being alive/being dead is inadmissible on a number of counts. Firstly, it relies on the false principle which states that for every process of coming to be, there is an opposite process. From Socrates' earlier principle 'what is more F proceeds from what was more G before', nothing follows about an opposite process that might succeed the change from one relative to another. Socrates rests his case on the idea that nature cannot be lame, as we have seen, but he is wrong to do so. Many processes in the world of generation are not reversible, such as the change from sight to blindness or cases where substances are destroyed, like a tree going up in smoke. Why should life and death not belong to changes of this sort, rather than

[4] Ebert (2004), 180 remarks that strictly speaking only the principle 'anything that comes to be more F was less F before' has any validity. He points out that while 'being less F (e.g. big)' is convertible into 'being more G (e.g. small)' in some cases, this is more controversial where value judgments are concerned (180, n. 18).

to those that involve reversible processes between opposite states? Since with life and death, the very survival of a subject capable of undergoing opposite processes is at issue, we cannot take it for granted.

For this reason, one might consider the possibility that Socrates, when he is talking about death, uses the word 'dead' in a rather more special sense. Rather than taking it to always imply 'having lived before', he might use it in an extended sense that would include 'having never lived at all'. The opposition between life and death, on this line of reasoning, becomes one between animate (ensouled) and inanimate (unensouled) things. An advantage of this construal is that the change from one (contradictory) opposite to the other will be necessary, just as it is trivially true that each black thing will have come to be from what is not-black. But, as has been pointed out before, to give 'dead' the sense of 'inanimate' is to weaken the cyclical argument significantly.[5] In ordinary language, 'being dead' implies 'having lived before'. In the special sense in which 'being dead' includes 'not having existed at all', this implication is not necessary. Therefore, the argument thus construed would say nothing about our survival after death as we normally understand it. A proof that we exist in some sense when we are dead (= inanimate) is different from a proof that we exist after we die (= have ceased to live).

We have thus reached a dilemma: either we need to assume, apparently inadmissibly, that there is a subject that exists independently from acquiring the properties 'alive' and 'dead', or we end up with a proof that has no bearing on the question of immortality, if we extend 'dead' to mean 'inanimate'.[6] What kind of assumptions did the ancient commentators on the *Phaedo* think necessary to supply to render the argument compelling? While this chapter is mainly about Syrianus' and Damascius' solutions, I will begin with a survey of some of the debates and developments that form the background to our commentators' interpretations.

2. *The Background to Syrianus and Damascius*

The pioneering figure of Syrianus stands behind much of the discussion of the cyclical argument in Olympiodorus' and Damascius'

[5] Cf. Barnes (1978), 416–417.
[6] See also Gallop (1982), 214–215, to whom I am much indebted here.

Commentaries on the Phaedo. Damascius' introduction to his own monograph on opposites (Dam.I.207) gives an assessment of Syrianus' achievement, together with a brief history of previous interpretations:

> (1) The older commentators have not been able to defend the argument from opposites in Plato's *Phaedo* as being a strong one, nor have they been able to hold their own against the attacks launched against it from the other schools. (2) The great Iamblichus, however, in a way characteristic of 'that spirit of his', has leapt too far by attempting to bring the argument to such a degree of completeness as to have it prove the complete immortality of the soul (ἀποδεῖξαι παντελῆ τὴν ψυχῆς ἀθανασίαν), which is more than Socrates himself dared to presume it could do. (3) Then Syrianus, with that balance and proportion which he shows in all things, guarding himself against the amateurism and helplessness of the earlier interpreters and attempting to tone down the greatness of Iamblichus, tried to keep within the limits of Socrates' professed intention while at the same time refuting those who make fun of the argumentation and proving them guilty of making baseless accusations. (Dam.I.207.1–9)

Damascius distinguishes three stages of interpretation. First are the 'older commentators', whose inability to defend the argument against unnamed opponents is reviewed unfavourably. Who are the defenders, and who are the opponents here? On the side of the defenders, we can count the Platonist Albinus; on the opponent's side, the Peripatetic Strato, some of whose criticisms are preserved in Dam.II, would have belonged to the more notorious objectors to the argument.[7]

Beginning with Strato then, it must be said right at the outset that the text of his objections most likely underwent several stages of redaction, and reaches us in a highly formalized manner, with all the difficulties of intepretation this implies. His attack opens with the observation that things that exist do not proceed from what has perished; hence the processes between opposites are not symmetrical in the sense required by the argument (Dam.II.63.1). The same point is brought home with other examples: the old proceed from the young, but not the young from the old; food becomes flesh, but not flesh food (63.4–5) (the problem of **symmetry**).[8] If dead or severed body parts do not come to life again, the whole body will not come to be alive again either (the problem of **privation**).

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[7] For Strato's criticisms, and Damascius' responses to them, cf. Dam.II.63–64. See also Gottschalk (1965), 164–166 for remarks on the possible provenance of the fragments.

[8] The example of food and flesh is puzzling: why would Strato think that a man who has been nourished by food, which has thus 'become flesh', could not in turn serve as food for a lion?

Between the things that proceed from each other, there is only specific, but not numerical identity (the problem of **identity**). If the substratum in which changes between opposites take place perishes, the succession of changes will come to a halt too (the problem of **persistence**).[9] If one end of the process comes to a halt, e.g. if the living do not proceed from the dead, genesis will not come a stop, as long as new living beings are continuously produced 'like artefacts' (the problem of **generation**).

These five puzzles present each of them real difficulties for the cyclical argument, and it is against the backdrop of Strato's objections that we can read Tertullian's attacks on the cyclical argument in his *De anima*. According to Tertullian, Plato's principle 'opposite proceeds from opposite' does not apply without restriction, for the following reasons:

> We too will set the born and the unborn against each other as opposites, and sight and blindness, youth and old age, wisdom and foolishness; yet neither does the unborn come forth from the born just because opposite comes to be from opposite, nor again does sight come from blindness, just because blindness arises from sight […]. This danger for his master Plato was also felt by Albinus who tried to make fine distinctions between different kinds of opposites (*subtiliter quaerit contrarietatum genera distinguere*), as though the opposites we mentioned are not opposed to one another as absolutely (*quasi non et haec tam absolute in contrarietatibus posita sint*) as the things which he expounded from the doctrine of his master, i.e. life and death.[10]

Here, Tertullian is mainly concerned with the problem of symmetry (e.g. youth and old age), but the example of blindness and sight touches the problem of privation also. Albinus would have had to deal with objections not dissimilar to the kind raised by Strato, and defended Plato by distinguishing different (unspecified) kinds of opposites. The *Didaskalikos* by Alcinous also assumes different kinds of opposites, as its restatement of the cyclical argument shows (25.2 Louis/177.36–44 Hermann):

> Things which are opposites without intermediate terms (τά τε ἄμεσα ἐναντία), not by themselves (μὴ καθ' αὑτὰ) but accidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς), naturally come to be from one another. Now what men call living is

[9] Strato's complaint is probably that the survival of a subject undergoing the relevant process of change is at issue in the argument and cannot be taken for granted.

[10] Tertullian, *De anima*, 29.13–24 [17–19 om.]. There is a possibility that Tertullian knew of Strato's criticisms through a work by the Platonist Albinus (his *Phaedo Commentary* or a larger work of Platonic doctrine) that would have refuted Strato point by point. See the detailed notes by Waszink (1947) on the passage (364–370).

> opposite to being dead. So even as death is the separation of the soul from the body, so too life is the union of soul (which obviously existed prior to that) with body. If the soul both will exist after death, and also existed before falling in with the body, then it becomes very probable that it is eternal (πιθανώτατον ἀίδιον αὐτὴν εἶναι), for it is not possible to conceive of anything that could destroy it.

Alcinous singles out 'opposites without intermediate terms' as the sense of 'opposite' relevant to the cyclical argument. It is likely that Alcinous here already presupposes a distinction between ἄμεσα and ἔμμεσα ἐναντία which we find in the later commentators.[11] The distinction is that between polar contraries on a continuous scale (ἔμμεσα), such as good and evil, and contradictories such as being awake and sleeping, which are opposites without intermediates (ἄμεσα) and jointly exhaustive in a substratum naturally suited to receiving them.

Unfortunately, the reasons why Alcinous prefers ἄμεσα over ἔμμεσα ἐναντία are not given in the passage, but it is possible that Socrates' own example of waking and sleeping and his reference to the 'two processes of generation' (71a13) that occur between opposites would have suggested that contraries admitting of intermediates are out of the question.[12] The distinction between ἄμεσα ἐναντία 'in themselves' and 'accidentally' here seems to amount to a distinction between opposites themselves, and opposites as present in a substrate.[13] The *Phaedo* argument presupposes that a process of change from opposite to opposite takes place in a given substrate, and only discusses the properties in themselves in the final argument (103a–c).

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[11] Cf. Aristotle *Cat*. 12a1 f.: ὥστε ἐν οἷς πέφυκε γίγνεσθαι ἢ ὧν κατηγορεῖται ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῶν θάτερον ὑπάρχειν, τούτων οὐδέν ἐστιν ἀνὰ μέσον ('If contraries are such that it is necessary for one or the other to belong to the things they naturally occur in or are predicated of, there is nothing intermediate between them'; tr. Barnes). The opposites without intermediates implied here are Alcinous' ἄμεσα, which can be translated as 'contradictories', although only in the sense in which Aristotle counts e.g. health and sickness as 'contradictories' (mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive properties) *with respect to* living bodies, since not everything must be either sick or healthy (rocks are neither). For the distinction between the two kinds of contraries in the *Phaedo Commentaries*, see Ol.10.10.4–11; Dam.I.192 and the notes *ad loc*. by Westerink (I.147; II.116). The existence of ἄμεσα ἐναντία was controversial: Olympiodorus *In Cat*. 138.23 ff. claims that odd and even are ἔμμεσα [sic] according to Plato; the doctrine is generalized by Elias *In Cat*. 181.9 ff.: ⟨κατὰ γὰρ Πλάτωνα⟩ πάντα [*sc*. τὰ ἐναντία] ἔμμεσα λέγεται.

[12] Cf. Barnes (1978), 405–410 for arguments in support of the contradictories reading, and Gallop (1982), 211–213 for some critical remarks.

[13] Dillon (1993), 152, suggests that Alcinous 'may have in mind that the true subject of discussion is rather the waking and sleeping *person*, or the live or dead *body*, which can only contain one or other of these attributes at any time.'

Both Albinus (according to Tertullian) and Alcinous in his *Didaskalikos* would therefore have made some precise logical distinctions between different senses of opposites. Interestingly, Alcinous claims that the cyclical argument proves the soul to be very probably eternal (πιθανώτατον ἀίδιον αὐτὴν εἶναι). His reasoning clearly depends on the assumption that soul has an existence independent of the body, and is joined to, and dissociated from, it (the definitions of 'life' and 'death'). The claims that soul existed before being joined to the body and continues to exist after the dissociation are mere consequences of that assumption. The inference that we cannot conceive of anything that could destroy the soul relies on the tacit premise that if anything survives death, it will be indestructible. In the *Phaedo*, of course, Cebes raises significant doubts about the validity of this reasoning (the soul may survive, and even have preexisted, for some indefinite time without the body, and yet disperse with the next gust of wind). Here, then, is a lesson of the dialogue that does not seem to have found its way into Alcinous' construction of the argument.

Although Alcinous' analysis does not follow the Platonic text very closely, we might suspect that Damascius' judgment on the incompetence of earlier interpreters of the cyclical argument is more than a little unfair. Some key elements of the later commentators' construction of the argument are already in place in Albinus and Alcinous, namely the definition of life and death in terms of the soul joining itself to, and dissociating itself from, the body, and, secondly, the distinction between different kinds of opposites relevant to the argument.

Iamblichus, in his analysis of the argument, went significantly further than the πιθανώτατον ἀίδιον αὐτὴν εἶναι of Alcinous. According to Damascius' report, Iamblichus claimed that the argument provides *proof* of the soul's complete immortality (Dam.I.207.5: ἀποδεῖξαι παντελῆ τὴν ψυχῆς ἀθανασίαν), unlike Alcinous, for whom the conclusion is only 'very probable' (πιθανώτατον). Olympiodorus restates Iamblichus' position as follows: 'if, he [*sc*. Iamblichus] says, the living and the dead arise out of each other and do this eternally (ἀεὶ), the soul will thus be eternal (ἀίδιος)' (Ol.11.2.3; Iamblichus *In Phd*. fr. 3 Dillon).[14] The underlying premise here must be the thought that since genesis is eternal, the living and the dead proceed from each other eternally—an interesting and not unreasonable interpretation of Socrates' supplementary argument at *Phd*. 72a11 ff.

[14] See also Dillon, (1973), 241 f.

The obvious difficulty with Iamblichus' view, that Socrates himself seems a good deal less ambitious about the force of the argument, was not overlooked by Syrianus, to whom we will turn in the next section of this chapter. For now, however, we should bear in mind Iamblichus' decision to include the eternity of genesis in his argument. This move is the background to an important controversy between Syrianus and Damascius: should the immortality of the soul be made dependent on the eternity of the world of generation, and if so, with what consequences?

3. *Syrianus*

Before pursuing the implications of, and possible objections to, Iamblichus' view any further, however, we should first consider how Syrianus thought the argument could best be understood. Damascius' commentary on the argument (Dam.I.207–252) is prefaced with a summary of the main points of Syrianus' interpretation (Dam.I.183–206). This summary will be our main source in the following. A second source is Olympiodorus, who dedicates two lectures to the argument (Ol.9–10). They contain a number of parallels with Syrianus in Damascius, as well as some points not found elsewhere.

3.1. *Syrianus' Interpretation of the Argument from Opposites in Outline*

Central to Syrianus' construction of the argument is a distinction made by Socrates himself at *Phd.* 103b. There are, on the one hand, opposite qualities such as the hot and the cold, which do not come to be from each other but only succeed each other; and, on the other, the bearers of these qualities, hot and cold things, which can come to be from each other provided something serves as a constant in the change from one to the other (e.g. a bodily substrate that can be heated and cooled). In the case of the argument from opposites, matters are somewhat complicated by the fact that we are dealing not with one substrate but with two, namely soul and body.[15] According to Syrianus, when a soul has been separated from the body, it is 'dead' (Dam.I.185.4). The process of becoming separated from the body, viz. 'dying', must have come to be from an opposite state, namely being joined to a body, or, in other words, 'being alive'. It seems, then, that Syrianus is willing to allow talk of 'living' and 'dead' souls. The

[15] Cf. Dam.I.190.4.

same point that life and death describe the union and separation of two substances, soul and body, can be made from the point of view of the body, too: a living being is a body animated by the soul, while something that has died is bereft of soul (Dam.I.188.1).

If we come back to Socrates' distinction between qualities and the bearers of qualities, the change from life to death (and vice versa) can be seen from two points of view. From the point of view of the qualities, when body and soul are separated, there is a change from association to separation. Since association and separation are opposites, they cannot co-exist, and so succeed each other. From the point of view of the substrates, which partake of the qualities association and separation, there is a change too, but one in which at least one of the two substrates must remain. An important assumption in this step of the argument is that the change between association and separation is cyclical: if two things are separated, they will also be joined together again.

Next, Syrianus wants to claim that the soul must be the constant thing that allows the change from being joined to being separated to be reversible, but we need to think why he would rule out the other possibilities, (i) that both the soul and the body survive, (ii) that neither survives, or (iii) that only the body survives. Let us begin with possibility (i). We may grant that the body is destroyed when the soul leaves it. In that case, union and separation of soul and body are not parallel to Jones' meeting with Smith and taking leave again from him. Only one of the two substrates, viz. soul, survives the separation. But the body surely remains as elemental stuff. Does this pose a threat to Syrianus' account? Presumably not, because for 'life' and 'death' to be the union and separation of two things that can exist independently of each other, the body that is left behind when the soul leaves it should remain the numerically identical body, which is not the case. Possibilities (ii) and (iii), that both soul and body perish when separated, or only the soul perishes, are closed off with much exegetical finesse. According to Syrianus, Socrates and his interlocutors already assume two things about the soul. Firstly, the characters in the dialogue take it for granted that the soul can be separated from the body, like air from a bag (Dam.I.185.2–3).[16] Secondly, Syrianus

[16] Our commentator here touches a supposed weak spot of the argument. If death is the annihilation of the soul-body compound, there is no subject that continues to exist, and so no change from death to life. On this line of argument, Socrates inadmissibly assumes what he needs to prove; see Gallop (1975; 105f.); Loriaux (1969) *inter alios*.

also thinks the characters assume soul to be stronger than the body (and therefore more likely to survive the separation than the body), just as in the example of the bag of air the bag remains while the air is dispersed (Dam.I.190.5–7). Paradoxically, the soul is both like the air leaving the bag and the bag without the air. We will see in the next section how Damascius justly attacks Syrianus on this point.

For my reconstruction of Syrianus' argument, I have relied largely on the evidence from Dam.I, but I believe that Olympiodorus' summary of the argument works along the same lines, although it is more implicit on a number of points (see below). For the sake of comparison, I shall quote it in full here:

> We must be aware, then, that (1) Plato intends a distinction between two kinds of opposites, the qualities themselves and the things that possess them (αὐτὰς τὰς ποιότητας ἢ τὰ ἔχοντα τὰς ποιότητας); (2) he does not mean that the qualities themselves change into each other, but rather that they succeed each other (because no part of whiteness is involved in the process of change into black), while it is the receiving bodies that are meant to change into each other, since there is something that remains in the change between opposites, namely the body.
>
> This being the case, (3) since life and death are also opposites (as is shown by Proclus, or rather by Syrianus, whose work Proclus has incorporated into his own commentary, without writing about these matters on the ground that his master had already treated them (μὴ γράφων εἰς αὐτὰ ὡς τοῦ διδασκάλου γράψαντος)—the proof runs 'Life and death are association and dissociation (σύγκρισις καὶ διάκρισίς), these are opposites, and the inference is obvious')—(4) since these two change into each other like qualities do (or rather (ἤτοι) they succeed each other),[17] it follows (5) that

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See also Dam.I.176; 179 for the Neoplatonic reply to this challenge, and Pakaluk (2003) for a similar approach, without reference to the Neoplatonists.

[17] Olympiodorus' use of ἤτοι without antecedent is best described as correcting 'loose talk': the phrase ἐπειδὴ ταῦτα [οὐ] μεταβάλλει εἰς ἄλληλα ὡς αἱ ποιότητες is strictly speaking inaccurate, since Olympiodorus has previously pointed out that qualities οὐ μεταβάλλειν εἰς ἄλληλα (ll. 3–4), but succeed each other. It is only living and dead things that change into each other, and only qualities that succeed each other. Since the subject of the sentence (ταῦτα) are still 'life' and 'death', understood as qualities ('association and dissociation'), Olympiodorus adds a corrective ἤτοι μετ' ἄλληλά εἰσιν. Dam.I.189–190 has the relevant, clearer, parallel to Olympiodorus' argument: opposites are either τὰ μετεχόμενα, which are κυρίως μετ' ἄλληλα, or τὰ μετέχοντα, which have something remaining of themselves and are therefore κυρίως ἐξ ἀλλήλων; Socrates in the argument from opposites has the latter in mind. The correspondence between Olympiodorus and Damascius is therefore αἱ ποιότητες-τὰ μετεχόμενα against τὰ ἔχοντα τὰς ποιότητας-τὰ μετέχοντα, and only the second sense is relevant to the cyclical argument, as requiring

> in the process of their change there must be something remaining, because there is in every change; and since (6) the body does not remain, but is dissolved into its elements, (7) the only other possibility is that the soul remains; and if it remains always, it follows that the soul is everlasting (ἀεὶ ἄρα ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ). (Ol.9.2.1–15)

Olympiodorus does not spell out explicitly the two key assumptions in Syrianus' argument: firstly, that separation and association are cyclical, i.e. that change from one to the other is in principle reversible, and secondly, that the soul is separable from, and stronger than, the body. For the rest, however, his summary corresponds to what we find in Damascius' report of Syrianus. First comes the distinction between qualities and their bearers (points 1 and 2), then the definition of life and death as the union and separation of two substances, soul and body (points 3–4), and finally the inference that for a succession of qualities to take place, there must be a surviving constant, for which soul alone qualifies (5–7).

3.2. *Syrianus' Approach to Particular Problems with the Argument*

Having set out Syrianus' interpretation of the argument as a whole, it remains to consider what sort of problems he raised, and how he attempted to resolve them. One fundamental difficulty in Plato's text is the precise sense of the term 'opposite' as it is used by Socrates. Syrianus distinguishes two kinds of opposites: opposites in the strict sense, and 'antithetical items' in general (cf. τὰ κυρίως ἐναντία ἢ τὰ ἁπλῶς ἀντικείμενα; Dam.I.191.1–2). As we have seen already, critics of the cyclical argument, such as Strato and Tertullian's source, could point out that it does not hold true of all kinds of opposites—the young do not proceed from the old, and the severed finger does not grow back naturally. Syrianus singles out 'opposites in the strict sense', i.e. proper contraries, as the kind of opposite that is relevant to the argument, and excludes cases of possession and privation (such as blindness and sight). According to Syrianus, this solution is not contradicted by the intrusion of relatives (such as greater and smaller) into Socrates' examples of opposites, since relatives are included in virtue of the opposition they contain (κατὰ τὴν ἐναντίωσιν; Dam.I.191.4). In so far as relatives share

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a constant underlying the change (cf. Dam.I.190.2: τούτων γὰρ μένει τι; Ol.9.2.6: διότι μένει ⟨τι⟩ ἐν τῇ μεταβολῇ; Ol.9.2.13: δεῖ ἄρα ἐν τῇ μεταβολῇ τούτων εἶναί τι τὸ μένον).

in 'opposite forms' (ἐναντία εἴδη) which are 'defined by nature', e.g. the great and the small, they are also genuine opposites (i.e. they proceed from each other in the same way as polar contraries like the just and the unjust are supposed to).

At Dam.I.192, Syrianus tackles another puzzle about opposites: Socrates appears to talk about opposites in general, while ruling out opposites with intermediate terms when he states that only 'two processes of generation' (71a13) take place between opposites, from A to B, and from B to A (therefore suggesting that the opposites in question lack intermediate terms, and are thus closer to contradictories than to opposites in general, which would include contraries). Syrianus' solution is to maintain that according to Plato all opposites have intermediate terms, since any continuum is infinitely divisible. Between any two points of a continuum, only two processes of generation can occur (i.e. from A to B and vice versa), so that Socrates' 'two processes of generation' apply to all opposites. Olympiodorus, who draws on Syrianus' material, gives the following example: 'whatever exists besides the white appears black by contrast with the white' (Ol.10.10.10).[18]

After this preliminary discussion of the function of the argument and the relevant terms involved, Syrianus' monograph proceeds through a number of difficulties, in the standard commentary format of 'problems and solutions', of which Damascius includes only a selection.[19] One set of problems discussed by Syrianus deals with the worry that the immortal and the mortal, the incorporeal and the corporeal, should, by the logic of Socrates' argument, also proceed from each other, if indeed they are opposites (Dam.I.193–194).[20] The worry, in other words, is that metaphysical distinctions fundamental to the Neoplatonic (and the

[18] The doctrine claims inspiration from two sources, (i) Plato's *Parmenides* (cf. Dam.I. 192.4), and (ii) Aristotle's *Physics* (cited at Ol.10.10.9–10 and Dam.I.192.5). As Westerink (1977), 116 notes, it is not easy to see which *Parmenides* passage could be used to back up the doctrine that all opposites have intermediate terms; nothing in the surviving parts of Proclus' or Damascius' *Commentaries* on the dialogue is of much help on this matter. In support of his view that intermediates are polar opposites 'in a sense', Syrianus can cite Aristotle's claim at *Physics* V.1.224b32: ἔστι γάρ πως τὸ μεταξὺ τὰ ἄκρα. As a result of Syrianus' curious doctrine, the cyclical argument would apply to all contraries (e.g. the change from lukewarm to warm), not only to polar contraries (from hot to cold).

[19] Dam.I.243.5–6: εἰσὶ δὲ αἱ γενναιότεραι τῶν παῤ αὐτῷ γεγραμμένων ἃς ἐπιλυτέον.

[20] Cf. Porphyry *In Arist. Cat.* 106.25–33 for a discussion of the problem whether the incorporeal is the opposite of the corporeal. No, says Porphyry, because (i) they do not belong to the same γένος, and (ii) in any case the incorporeal is not ἐν καταφάσει λέγεται but ἐν στερήσει.

Platonic!) universe would break down if the argument from opposites were valid. As a way of solving this problem, Syrianus argues that the terms immortal-mortal and incorporeal-corporeal are not in fact proper opposites. The immortal is not opposed to the mortal but in fact creates and perfects it; the incorporeal either (i) transcends all change (at the level of the divine), or (ii) uses the body as its substrate (like the soul ordering the body), or (iii) enters the constitution of bodies as matter and form.

A second set of puzzles deals with processes that are not symmetrical or reversible but take an irreversible linear direction (see b, below) or that have one definite starting point (see a, below). Thus, (a) sleeping proceeds from waking, but not waking from sleeping; a child, for instance, is born without having slept before. Moreover, (b) the older may come from the younger, but not the younger from the older. Against objection (a), Syrianus would hold that being born awake is merely accidental (Dam.I.195). Olympiodorus puts the same thought in slightly different language: waking is a 'concomitant' (παρακολούθημα), not a primary end of nature, like the shavings that result as by-products of planing when the carpenter dresses wood.[21] The problem (b) why the younger do not proceed from the older seems to have given rise to a whole variety of solutions proposed by Syrianus.[22] One strategy is to deny that becoming older and becoming younger are opposite processes at all, since there is no natural process of becoming younger. An alternative solution is to look for a sense in which the younger does proceed from the older, namely in the case of child birth. The most ingenious solution, however, is the following (found only in Olympiodorus): if we think of old and young as relatives like large and small, then the relative oldness of the older person to the younger reduces year by year, so that the older gets relatively younger.[23]

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[21] Cf. Ol.9.5.4.

[22] Syrianus is also to be credited with an interesting solution to the question how something can become both older and younger than itself, in response to Plato *Parm.* 141a–b. Cf. Proclus *In Parm.* 1226.26–1227.30 (fr. 9 in Sarah Klitenic's (2005) edition of Syrianus' fragments *In Tim.* and *In Parm.*).

[23] For example, the proportional difference between young (B) and old (A) will decrease with age if one expresses it as follows: when B is born, A is older than B by seven years (e.g.) at a given time (T^1). The proportion by which A exceeds B in years will become smaller over time, and in that sense A can be said to become younger. After one year, A stands to B at time T^2 = 8:1, where A exceeds B by a fraction of his (A's) age (7/8), which will decrease with both A's and B's getting older (7/9, 7/10 …). The ultimate source for this argument is *Parm.* 154d–155a.

3.3. *How Much Does the Argument from Opposites Prove?*

We have already seen that Iamblichus appears to have based his construction of the argument from opposites on the assumption that the living and the dead will proceed from each other eternally. Syrianus departs significantly from Iamblichus by stating right at the outset of his monograph that the object of the proof is to show merely that the soul remains (ἐπιδιαμένει) in Hades, whether for a short time, a long time or for an infinite duration (Dam.I.183.4–6; cf. Ol.10.1.11–12). The Platonic evidence that our commentator can muster in support of his contention is powerful: Cebes' immediate concern at *Phd*. 69e is only whether the soul might not perish immediately upon its departure from the body. Socrates himself rephrases Cebes' question as concerning the existence of the souls of the dead in Hades (70c) and considers the point as proven at 72e. Finally, when restating Cebes' earlier worry that soul might wear itself out in the course of multiple incarnations, Socrates effectively acknowledges that he has yet to give a proof of complete immortality (95b–e).

Besides the textual evidence that would go against construing the argument from opposites as proof of complete immortality, Syrianus can give sound philosophical reasons for restricting the argument's force. Our evidence here comes mainly from two brief texts (Dam.I.205–206):

> (1) Πῶς οὐ πάντῃ δείκνυσιν αὐτὴν ἀθάνατον ὁ λόγος; Ἢ ὅτι οὔσης ἀεὶ τῆς γενέσεως ἰσχύει, ἀνελὼν δέ τις τὴν γένεσιν ἀναιρεῖ καὶ τὸν λόγον.
>
> In what sense does the argument not prove that the soul is immortal in every way? It has force provided that there is always the world of generation. But if one were to remove the world of generation, one would also invalidate the argument.
>
> (2) Ὅτι εἰ μὴ καὶ ἀθάνατον δείκνυσιν ὁ λόγος, ἀλλὰ ἀγένητον ἀποδείκνυσιν. εἰ γὰρ τὸ ζῶν ἐκ τοῦ τεθνηκότος, οὐκ ἔσται αὐτῆς πρώτη γένεσις.
>
> Ἀλλὰ δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τοῦτο τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἤρτηται.
>
> Even if the argument does not prove that the soul is immortal, it proves that it has not come to be. For if the living proceed from the dead, there will be no first point of generation.
>
> But obviously this depends on the same hypothesis.

One difficulty which we face in text (1) is how to construe the sentence οὐ πάντῃ δείκνυσιν αὐτὴν ἀθάνατον ὁ λόγος. A natural way to read it is to take πάντῃ as qualifying the verb δείκνυσιν, as is easiest given the run of the sentence. On this reading, the argument is not a complete demon-

stration of immortality because it rests on a hypothesis. Presumably, the thought would be that for any argument of the form 'if P, then Q; if Q, then R', for R to be completely proven, one would also have to prove P, rather than assuming it independently. Apply this to the argument from opposites: 'if the world of generation is eternal, then the cycle of opposites is everlasting, and then the soul is immortal'. Since Socrates does not prove the eternity of genesis independently in the *Phaedo*, the argument cannot by itself prove more than that souls are recycled as long as genesis continues to exist, however long that might be. The very possibility that the world of generation may come to a halt and all things end up dead is raised, and swiftly rejected as absurd, by Socrates himself at *Phd.* 72b–e.

Text (1) amounts to saying, therefore, that the argument is valid if one assumes that the world of generation will continue to run its course forever. Only then will the change from the living to the dead carry on for good, and only then will it be guaranteed that our souls exist in Hades. What the argument does fully prove is not the soul's (unlimited) post-existence, but rather its pre-existence, as text (2) makes clear (I assume here that ἀθάνατον in (2) is the logical counterpart to ἀγένητον, thus meaning unlimited survival). For if souls that are now incarnate have been previously discarnate, but those that have been previously discarnate were themselves incarnate before (and so on *ad infinitum*), it follows that there cannot have been any point in time when souls had come to be. They have always been there to animate bodies. The passage concludes with a critical comment:[24] the soul will only be fully ungenerated if the cycle of incarnations goes back indefinitely in time. But this would require the world of generation to be eternal *a parte ante*, a hypothesis which is not demonstrated by Socrates, in the same way as its eternal existence *a parte post* is not.

One difficulty about Syrianus' view on what the argument proves arises from Damascius' reproach that Syrianus, having first claimed that the argument is contingently true (ἐνδεχόμενον εἶναι τὸν λόγον προειπών;

[24] The comment at Dam.I.206.3 is unlikely to be a self-criticism by Syrianus, and probably derives from Proclus or Damascius (as Westerink (1977), 123 recognizes). The latter returns to the issue whether the argument proves the pre-existence of the soul in his list of problems that Syrianus' construction of the argument leaves unresolved (Dam.I.220). Damascius' own construction of the argument needs to assume nothing about the pre-existence of the soul and would prove the soul's survival while at the same time allowing that soul may come to be in time with the constitution of the living being (Dam.I.242.14–16).

Dam.I.207.12), ends up by giving it a necessity as strong as the necessity that holds the world together.[25] There is virtually no evidence from Syrianus' own comments at Dam.I.183–206 that could explain this notion of contingency, although there is a later passage that appears to group together Syrianus' view with that of Harpocration:

> (A) Ὅτι οὕτως ἐξηγούμενοι ὡς ὁ φιλόσοφος οὐκ ἐκφευξούμεθα τὸ μὴ οὐκ ἀθάνατον αὐτὴν ἀποδεικνύναι τὸ πάμπαν· εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ γένεσις, ἀλλὰ καὶ οὕτως ἀίδιος, ἴσα γε τῷ παντὶ καὶ ὅλῳ.
>
> If we follow the interpretation of the philosopher, we will not escape making the argument a complete proof that soul is immortal. For even if the soul lasts as long as the world of generation, it is still eternal, in the same way as the universe is.
>
> (B) εἰ δὲ διὰ τοῦτο ἐνδεχομένη ἡ ἀπόδειξις, ὅτι τεκμηριώδης, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰκὸς οὐδὲ τὸ τεκμήριον, ἄλυτον δέ τι καὶ ἀναγκαῖον.
>
> And if the proof is to be considered contingent because it rests on inferences from a sure sign, even so the sure sign on which this inference rests is not merely 'likely' but something irrefutable and necessary. (Dam.I.216)

The reasoning criticized in (A) above seems to be exactly what we have seen Syrianus himself say: the argument is incomplete in so far as its validity depends on soul being co-eternal with the world of generation. The view given in (B), however, is rather more puzzling. From an earlier note in Damascius, we know that the interpretation of εἰκὸς at *Phd.* 70a7 in terms of 'inference from a sure sign' derives from Harpocration (Dam.I.182.2). What, though, is this sign from which are to infer the soul's immortality in (B)? I take it that we are to infer from the continued and observable cycle of change from opposite to opposite to the soul's immortality. Damascius' objection to this line of argument points out that inferences from sure signs are not 'contingent' because their starting point is an irrefutable and necessary sign of the thing that is being inferred (just as e.g. ash is an irrefutable sign that there once was fire).[26]

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[25] Dam.I.182.2f. gives a different explanation of why the cyclical argument is only contingently true. Socrates at *Phd.* 70a7 calls the possibility of survival 'likely' (εἰκὸς) because it proves merely that post-death existence in Hades is possible (ἐνδέχεται), but not necessary. If the number of souls is infinite, the world of generation can continue to exist, even if souls perish after death. See also Dillon (1971), 135f., who attributes the solution to Harpocration, and Gioè (2002), 465f.

[26] Thus, I differ from Westerink in translating ἄλυτον with 'irrefutable' rather than

That leaves us with two possibilities: either Syrianus himself cited Harpocration's view with approval as an alternative way of limiting the argument's force, or Damascius is grouping together two different views that he considers kindred in spirit. We cannot rule out either option on the basis of the text alone, unfortunately, and must leave it at that.

In sum, Syrianus moves away from Iamblichus' reading of the argument from opposites, for textual as well as philosophical reasons. All that the argument proves is that the soul remains after death for some time, as the characters of the dialogue acknowledge. The same point can be made with reference to the logic of the argument. Only if the eternity of the world of generation is assumed will the argument constitute a full proof of immortality.

4. *Damascius: Σῴζεται ὁ Λόγος?*

Notwithstanding Damascius' stated intention to add merely 'a few remarks and to define precisely what the cycle [*sc.* of opposites] is, and what things are subject to it, and to show that the argument is true in the sense of a contingent truth' (Dam.I.207.16f.), his construction of the cyclical argument differs in important respects from that of his predecessor Syrianus. As so often with Damascius, his innovative solutions are the result of a detailed critique and analysis of earlier views. He takes it for granted that his students will have studied Syrianus' monograph, and explicitly refuses to 'copy' (μεταγράφειν; Dam.I.208.9) what his predecessor has said. Damascius' own 'monograph' is structured in three parts: the first consists in objections that remain after Syrianus' interpretation; the second presents the assumptions on which Damascius' own analysis is based; and the third and final part illustrates how Damascius' version of the argument overcomes the objections to which Syrianus' version is prone.

'indestructible'. Cf. Aristotle *Rhet*. 1357b1–20. See also the entry on τεκμήριον in Suidas, and Morrison (1997) for some ancient debates over the status of tekmeriodic proofs. Sorabji (2005b), 265–268 contains a number of important texts on the subject (especially Philoponus *In de an. Post*. 49.5–14; 17–21 and 168.19–169.8). Van Riel, Macé and Follon, (2008), 113 n. 3 argue that tekmeriodic proofs are accepted as conclusive by Simplicius, Philoponus and Damascius.

4.1. *Damascius' Critique of Syrianus*

The first part of Damascius' monograph contains eleven different criticisms; in the following, I will discuss the most important points, without pretending to provide an exhaustive survey. There are three main classes of criticisms, in accordance with a division Damascius himself makes in his summary:

> [Syrianus] (i) needs many extraneous elements (πολλῶν τε γὰρ ἐπεισοδίων ἐδεήθη) not expressed in the text, and (ii) having first said that the argument is contingently true (ἐνδεχόμενον εἶναι τὸν λόγον προειπών), he ends up granting it a necessity (ἐτελεύτησεν […] προϊὼν εἰς τὴν ἀνάγκην) as great as the necessity that holds the world of generation together; and besides, (iii) he does not show that this necessity is common to everything, which was Socrates' claim, but only to the generation of human beings, and even there not universally, but only as far as the soul is concerned. (Dam.I.207.11–16)

Criticisms pertaining to (i), the extraneous elements (i.e. assumptions that are not based on the text of the *Phaedo* itself), take up the bulk of Damascius' critique. As we have seen in the previous section, Syrianus defines life and death as opposites in the sense of association and separation, where two different substances, soul and body, are cyclically joined together and separated. But, objects Damascius, there is no reason to think that what is separated will be joined together again, or that what has been joined together will be separated again. In the case of smoke being separated from wood, for example, we do not see it being joined to the wood again; hence there is a counter-example to the idea that association and dissociation proceed from each other cyclically (Dam.I.209).

Another 'extraneous' element in Syrianus' analysis is his view that two substances, soul and body, are being joined together and separated in turn. Damascius can point out that Socrates' examples for the most part suggest that only one substance receives different properties in turn, such as being joined together and separated at *Phd.* 71b2–7. According to Damascius, being joined together and being separated must therefore be explained in the same way as heating or cooling, which Socrates mentions immediately afterwards. If heating and cooling apply to only one substance, then being separated and being joined together must also apply to only one substance too, not to two (Dam.I.214).[27]

[27] I am not confident that Westerink's explanation of the passage is the most natural: he claims that 'cooling and heating' are made equivalent to 'composition and decomposition'.

A third assumption that is crucial for Syrianus' argument concerns the soul's greater strength relative to the body. As we have seen, this assumption was necessary to rule out that the body survives as the constant element underlying the change in qualities. Here, Damascius makes a good textual point: if Cebes' example of air coming out of a bag is to be taken seriously, it surely implies that the interlocutors assume the soul is weaker than the body, just as air is more easily dispersed than the bag that contains it (Dam.I.215).

I have already discussed point (ii) in Damascius' summary above, that Syrianus' version of the argument proves more than it was designed to do (cf. Dam.I.216). The problem hinges on Syrianus' decision to make the soul's immortality depend on the continued existence of the world of generation, which for Damascius is a necessity ensured by the providence of the gods.[28]

The third major criticism against Syrianus' analysis (point (iii) above), that it is too restrictive, takes issue with his claim that the argument deals with the joining and disjunction of body and soul, which are proper opposites equivalent to life and death (Dam.I.185). Against Syrianus, Damascius points to Socrates' demand to consider the argument in relation to all things that come into being (*Phd.* 70d–e), not merely to cases where composition and decomposition of two substances are involved (Dam.I.213).[29]

4.2. *Damascius' Own Version of the Argument*

We have thus considered the three main points of his criticism of Syrianus; what remain are the ways in which the lessons from Syrianus' shortcomings play out in Damascius' own version of the argument. The summary at Dam.I.252 serves this purpose:[30]

> (1) The goal (σκοπός) of the argument is to show that the soul, once it has been brought forth with its 'instrument'[31] (σὺν τῷ ὀργάνῳ γεννηθεῖσαν)

I take it that Damascius is making the simpler point that if cooling and heating affect a single body only, then the preceding example should be about one body also, however we may want to understand composition and decomposition in that case. Cf. Westerink (1977), 129.

[28] Cf. Dam.I.217.3–4.

[29] Cf. also Dam.I.235 for Damascius' solution to the problem (Socrates' argument applies to the relation between substances and accidents in general, not only to the specific case of association and dissociation).

[30] See also the summary at Dam.II.1–3, esp. 2.

[31] Damascius here refers to the Aristotelian notion of the body as the 'instrument' of

> and has for the first time formed a man, from not-man, not from a dead man, will then constitute him again, in order to prove that the soul survives after death […].
>
> (2) If soul is an incorporeal substance that produces life in bodies (ἡ ψυχὴ οὐσία ἐστὶν ἀσώματος ζωοποιὸς τῶν σωμάτων) and therefore not subject to the privation of life; (3) if furthermore, in each substance there is the cyclic alternation of opposite accidents, the accidents themselves remaining the same in kind, the substance remaining numerically the same—(4a) if forever, the cycle is infinite and everlasting; (4b) if for a maximum period, it completes a maximum number of cyclic changes; (4c) if for a short period, a small number; but in any case, (4) there will be more than one recurrence, both because this is what manifestly happens and because any substance must be more durable than its own accidents, unless destroyed before its time by unusual violence (εἰ μὴ βιαιότερον φθαίη διαφθαρεῖσα); (5) if this is true, as has been shown before, it must necessarily be true of soul also: (5a) if the soul is immortal, it will leave the body and return (ἀνακάμπτουσαν) to it sooner or later an infinite number of times, (5b) and if it has a life that lasts many ages or at least a long time, (5c) or else a short time only, it will continue its cycle of descent and ascent as long as it survives, but at least it will undergo the alternation of opposite accidents several times, as far as this depends on the capacity of its own nature. (tr. Westerink, modified)

(1) Damascius defines the argument's purpose in response to a difficulty raised by Syrianus: if an animal is born waking, it has not proceeded from a prior state of sleeping; therefore the cycle of opposites does not hold in all cases, contrary to what Socrates asserts. Syrianus claims that the waking state is an accident of being born; Olympiodorus, possibly drawing on Proclus here, resolves the difficulty by pointing out that the waking state is accidentally caused, like the shavings from a carpenter planing wood. Against this, Damascius points out that the 'first generation of anything is not from the opposite form, but from what is not-such [i.e. its privation]', irrespective of whether the first generation concerns substances or accidents (Dam.I.246). The point that waking is an accident of a substance is superfluous on Damascius' reasoning, since he needs only to maintain that the first waking state of a living being proceeds from what is not-awake. Note that Damascius' formulation is compatible with the view that soul comes into being when it is first joined to a body, i.e. that it has a beginning in time. All that the cyclical

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the soul. Cf. Aristotle *De an.* 412a28; b5. Nothing depends on it as far as the argument is concerned, although it recurs at Dam.I.218.

argument aims to prove is that soul survives death; its pre-existence is proven by the argument from recollection (Dam.I.242.16f.).

(2) In what sense, though, does the soul constitute a man after death, and why should this be entailed by the argument? Here, Damascius anticipates the key point of the *Phaedo*'s final argument: soul, whenever it is present to a body, gives life to it. Assumed here, then, is the point that soul is an incorporeal substance (as granted by Cebes) with an intrinsic life-giving power, just as fire has the power of heating; the body on the other hand possesses life by participation (Dam.I.234). Hence, soul cannot lose its essential property of being alive, and is therefore not subject to death upon separating from the body. Evidently, Damascius here imports the upshot of the concluding argument of the *Phaedo* into the cyclical argument, a move which may betray the inability of the cyclical argument to present a demonstration of even limited survival after death on its own premises alone.[32] Premise (3) below gives a different reason for the soul's survival of death, and may be regarded as more properly relevant to the cyclical argument, insofar as it expands on the role of accidental properties in the argument, rather than relying on the idea of essential attributes.

(3) The cycle of accidents in a substance commits Damascius to the minimal assumption that a substance is more lasting than any of its accidents, an assumption developed in place of Syrianus' claim that soul is stronger than the body. Since this assumption requires that all accidents are less stable than their substances, the cyclical argument is only contingently true, since it is possible to envisage that substances may not outlive their accidents in the future, whatever the reasons for such a change may be. The reason for believing that accidents are weaker than their substances lies in their dependence on substances, in which accidents 'have their being' (Dam.I.225). Since all accidents share this property in common, one cannot legitimately exempt any one pair, e.g. life and death, from the general rule (Dam.I.241.3ff.).

In an elaborate restatement of Socrates' supplementary demonstration, Damascius does his best to argue for the plausibility of his position: if we assume that life and death are accidents of a substance, soul, and moreover, that one change of accidents, from life to death, destroys the substance, the following absurdity results. Since all accidents are logically

[32] A point vigorously argued for by Barnes (1978), who restricts the argument's scope to soul's pre-natal existence.

equal in respect of their dependence on substances, we cannot allow one change of accident to destroy a substance without allowing all changes of accidents to do the same. Thus, the claim that the change from life to death destroys a substance is logically equal to the claim that the change from hot to cold destroys it (Dam.I.241).

(4) From premise (3), that every substance outlasts a change in its accidents, it follows that there will be more than one recurrence of accidents, unless the substance is destroyed before its time by 'unusual violence'. How many recurrences the soul may endure is left open by Damascius, evidently in an effort to avoid importing unnecessary and controversial assumptions into the argument. His construction avoids inferring the soul's durability from the fact that the cycle of generation is everlasting and only a finite number of souls exist, as Iamblichus, and after him Syrianus, had done. Instead, Damascius makes the duration of the cycle depend on the soul's durability, without committing himself to a particular option from among 4(a)–(c).

(5) The conclusion from premises (3) and (4) follows neatly: since soul is a substance of which life and death are accidents, soul must outlast the change of its accidents at least for a minimal period. Full immortality is left as an option under (5a), but not supposed to have been demonstrated by the argument.

5. *Conclusion*

To what extent, then, does Damascius offer a more satisfying analysis of the argument than his predecesssors? As we have seen, Damascius' first move is to abandon Syrianus' idea that the cyclical argument is concerned with cases where two substances are joined together and separated. Rather, says Damascius, the argument applies to only one substance considered in itself, namely soul, which can undergo a change in its accidents (the accidents in question here being soul's relation to the body). The change in accidents which the soul undergoes is an instance of a general principle that applies to the whole of generation: any substance is more lasting than a single change of its accident. The change from 'being joined to the body' to 'being separated from it' in the case of soul is no different in principle from more hum-drum instances of change, such as that from waking to sleeping in a living being.

By stating the issue in this way, Damascius avoids a number of pitfalls. Most importantly, he does not need to say anything about the relative

strength or weakness of soul and body. We have seen that Syrianus had introduced the assumption that soul is stronger than the body to support his point that the body cannot be the constant underlying the change from union to separation of two substances. Damascius, on the other hand, can even admit the possibility that soul is weaker than the body. All that is required for the purposes of the argument is that soul survives a single succession of opposite accidents in relation to the body, from being joined to a body to being separated from it.

A second respect in which Damascius' construction of the argument is more satisfactory than that of Syrianus hinges on the question what *sort* of argument the argument of opposites is, and what precisely it proves. The late Neoplatonic interpreters—with the notable exception of Iamblichus—were agreed that the argument proves only limited post-mortem survival, not full-blown immortality. Thus, we would expect Syrianus to make only the modest claim that the argument proves limited survival after death. Oddly, however, he seems to have made the extent of immortality dependent on the existence of the world of generation: the soul exists as long as the world is held together. This is not quite the same as having the argument prove complete immortality, but it is a very strong conclusion nonetheless.

For Damascius, the argument depends only on the weak claim that substances are more lasting than their accidents. As long as this truth—inferred from our experience of the world—holds, the *logos* is saved. This does not yet rule out the possibility that substances could one day start to perish when changing their accidents. As far as the argument is concerned, nothing prevents living beings from perishing tomorrow when they change from hot to cold, from waking to sleeping, or from moist to dry. If substances were to become unable to outlast their accidents, everything would come to perish in time, since the generation of new substances could not keep pace with the destruction of existing ones. One may wish to dispute Damascius' contention that life and death are accidents in the same sense as hot or cold, or indeed accidents at all. Yet if it is legitimate to take for granted the separability of soul from the outset of the argument, life and death as conjunction with, and disjunction from, the body could seem to be no more than accidental relations.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEMORY, FORGETFULNESS AND RECOLLECTION IN THE COMMENTARIES ON PLATO'S *PHAEDO*

1. *Introduction*

Socrates' argument from opposites at *Phd*. 69e–72d had set out to prove the existence of the soul after death; but, as Socrates himself recognizes, a full proof of immortality requires that we demonstrate both the soul's existence before its embodiment and its existence after physical death. The argument from recollection that occupies pages 72e3–78b3 of the *Phaedo* is first introduced by Cebes as an independent argument showing that 'soul seems to be something immortal in this way too' (καὶ ταύτῃ ἀθάνατον ἡ ψυχή τι ἔοικεν εἶναι; 73a2–3). At the conclusion of the argument, at 77b1, however, Simmias raises the concern that, irrespective of its pre-existence, soul may still come to an end after death. Cebes promptly agrees with Simmias that only one half of the immortality thesis has so far been covered (77c1–5). But Socrates suggests that the argument should be combined (cf. 77c7: συνθεῖναι) with the argument from opposites and reminds both his interlocutors that the existence of soul after death has already been proved (77c9 ff.):

> εἰ γὰρ ἔστιν μὲν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ πρότερον, ἀνάγκη δὲ αὐτῇ εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἰούσῃ τε καὶ γιγνομένῃ μηδαμόθεν ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐκ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ τεθνάναι γίγνεσθαι, πῶς οὐκ ἀνάγκη αὐτὴν καὶ ἐπειδὰν ἀποθάνῃ εἶναι, ἐπειδή γε δεῖ αὖθις αὐτὴν γίγνεσθαι;
>
> For if the soul exists also before, and it must both come into life and be born from nowhere else but from death and from being dead, how can it not be necessary that it exists after it has died as well, given, at any rate, that it must be born again?

If the soul has existed before entering the body, and enters into living from a state of separation from the body ('death and being dead'; d2), it must also survive when it has become separated again ('when it has died'; d3–4) in order to be reborn. At first sight, nothing that Socrates says at this point seems to go beyond the purported conclusion of the cyclical argument. Although the claim 'soul existed before [entering the body]'

(77c9–d1) could be supported by the recollection argument, it would follow equally well from the cyclical argument.[1] When Socrates summarizes the cyclical argument, he includes the premise that 'all that is living comes from what is dead' (77c8–9), which must entail the pre-existence of some souls to animate the 'dead', i.e. people not yet in existence. There is a difficulty, then, in deciding to what extent the recollection argument has brought the discussion forward, and Socrates' combined proof seems to make little use of its more interesting conclusions (in particular, the claim that soul when separated from the body has 'some power and wisdom', as stated by Cebes at 70b3–4).

The central insights underlying the argument from recollection have been worked out in the famous slave-boy example in the *Meno* (81e3–86e6), which is presented as a solution to the problem how learning is possible ('we can inquire neither into what we do not know nor into what we know already'). The slave-boy, under Socrates' dialectical guidance, arrives at a geometrical insight that he did not consciously know before, thus providing an example of how, through skilful questioning, knowledge which one was not previously aware of possessing may be brought to light. In the *Phaedo*'s argument from recollection, Socrates builds on this epistemological point, that knowledge may come about by 'being reminded', while at the same time clarifying the ontological status of the kind of knowledge that the soul is being reminded of (74a9–77a5).

The central features of the kind of recollection under discussion in the *Phaedo* are set out carefully by Socrates himself:

(i) Recollection implies having previous knowledge of the thing recollected (73c1–2).
(ii) Recollection may be triggered by sense-perception (73c6–7).
(iii) When (ii) occurs, recollection involves a different knowledge from the things that trigger recollection (73c7–d1).
(iv) Recollection can be caused by similar or dissimilar things (74a2–3).
(v) Where recollection is caused by similar things, a judgment as to whether the item perceived falls short of what it resembles is inevitably made by the one who recollects (74a5–7).

[1] See also Gallop (1975), 135–137, who raises the difficulty that if the argument from opposites were to prove both halves of the immortality thesis, both post- and pre-existence, the recollection argument would have no obvious philosophical work left to do, *pace* Socrates' claim at 77c9ff. Since Olympiodorus and Damascius do not consider the argument from opposites to prove any more than limited post-existence, they can fully account for the division of labour between the two arguments as Socrates proposes it.

These five features are on the whole perspicuous, with the exception perhaps of (iii) and (v). Before turning to these two particular conditions for recollection, it is worth making a comment about Socrates' remark at 73e1–3 that recollection occurs especially when we are reminded of something that we have forgotten through the passage of time or inattention. As Rowe remarks, this condition cannot well apply to the examples Socrates himself gives: 'it would be a poor lover who had actually forgotten his beloved'.[2] Being reminded of a lover by his cloak implies no more than that he slipped out of one's mind momentarily. The argument that when recovering our knowledge of forms we are reminded of something that we forgot on being born, on the other hand, requires a more profound sort of forgetfulness, and it must be this that Socrates has in mind at 73e1–3.

Requirement (iii), that a 'different knowledge' be involved in recollection, is illustrated by the example of looking at a lyre and being reminded of one's lover, or being reminded of a person from his or her portrait. Socrates explains that knowing a man and knowing a lyre are different, but the precise nature of this difference is left unclear. At its simplest, Socrates may be saying no more than that the two are distinct items of knowledge that are not intrinsically connected (unlike e.g. the number five and 'uneven'). I can know Cebes without recognizing this particular lyre as his, and I can know that this arrangement of string and wood is a lyre without having any notion of Cebes at all.[3]

More contentious is the application of (v). Socrates claims that when we are reminded of Simmias by looking at Simmias' portrait, we are not only aware of the similarity that exists between Simmias and his portrait, but we also ask ourselves whether the portrait falls short of what it represents. This notion of 'falling short' in respect to some original will recur in the discussion of recollection of forms, but what precisely does it entail? Not all portraits of Simmias are necessarily also bad portraits of Simmias—there ought to be some good ones, too. Socrates' point, then, must be that it is a condition of being an image or a portrait not to resemble the original in every respect. Only in this sense is an image always deficient when compared to its original.[4] In cases of being reminded, we are of course aware that what does the reminding is not Simmias himself but a portrait of someone, whom we identify as Simmias.

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[2] Rowe (1993), 166.
[3] A point drawn out by Ackrill (2001), 20f.
[4] Cf. Gosling (1965).

How are the five characteristics of recollection to be applied to Platonic forms? The crucial passage (*Phd*. 74b6–9) is notoriously difficult to interpret. It sets out to argue that equal things are deficient in a way that the Form of Equality is not. Quite in what sense the equal particulars are deficient is a matter of considerable controversy, due to Plato's compact Greek at this point. I will here follow a suggestion made by Sedley, according to which Socrates is effectively claiming: 'equal sticks and stones appear sometimes equal to each other, and sometimes unequal to each other, while they, the sticks and stones, remain the same'.[5] Beyond equal things, however, there is the equal itself, which never appears to be unequal. When we realize that sensible sticks and stones are not perfectly equal, we recognize their deficiency by judging them against the standard of the equal itself. But since we are reminded of the equal itself in this way, we must also have had previous knowledge of it, by the criterion for recollection ('being reminded') Socrates had set out at the very beginning of the argument.[6] All our sense-perceptions begin at the moment of birth; therefore, for our knowledge of the equal itself to precede our perception of equal things, it must precede birth.

For Socrates to strengthen his claim that knowledge of forms (such as the equal itself) in this life is really only recollection of a knowledge that the soul possessed before but that was lost at birth, he must fully rule out the alternative scenario, that knowledge of the equal begins together with perception, rather than preceding it. Simmias raises the possibility that we gain knowledge of the forms at birth, but he seems to give in too easily to Socrates' point that we cannot explain how the knowledge gained at birth is lost. If, as has been already agreed by Simmias, we are not born knowing but are reminded of our knowledge in later life, we need to explain at what time we could have lost it. Yet, Socrates pursues, the only time at which we could have lost the knowledge that we are reminded of is the very time at which we acquire it. Simmias' challenge to the idea that knowledge has to be acquired pre-natally is thus laid to rest somewhat swiftly; after all, is Simmias not conceding far too much at the outset, when accepting the disjunction that knowledge is either always known throughout the whole of life, or that it is lost and then regained by recollection?

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[5] Cf. Sedley (2007), 76–77.

[6] See point (i) above, p. 98.

The focus of this chapter will be the interpretation of the recollection argument at the hands of Olympiodorus and Damascius, and to show how they enrich their reading of the text with a cluster of problems surrounding the concepts of memory, recollection and forgetfulness.[7] Firstly, I will consider the question how much the argument proves, and whether it is necessary to assume the pre-existence of the soul in order to explain recollection. How would a Neoplatonic commentator respond to Simmias' objection to Socrates, that the soul may have come to be with its knowledge already present?

While Proclus and Damascius hold some original arguments against Simmias' challenge in store, however, they also offer arguments against a rival account of concept formation that does not feature in the discussion of the *Phaedo*: Aristotle's theory of abstraction. They discuss this theory in the course of defining the precise level of forms involved in the activity of recollecting. Since the *Phaedo* is a dialogue concerned with 'purification', the only forms under discussion here are the essential reason-principles within soul, not the more august transcendent forms in the Intellect. The starting-points of recollection lie in perception, which stirs the hidden essential reason-principles in the soul, but as soul turns its attention towards itself and sets itself free from the obstacles posed by sensation, it becomes a knower in actuality.[8] Yet rather than being the summit of Platonic teaching on science and discovery, recollection is but a step on the path to principles of which no scientific knowledge is possible, i.e. the transcendent forms in the Intellect.

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[7] The wealth of references to the theory of recollection in Neoplatonic writings is daunting, and I cannot here attempt to give even a fair reflection of the available material; but see Baltes (2002), 161–163 for a collection of references. Atticus fr. 7.23–25 draws on the central lesson from Plato's *Meno* and makes the very existence of learning depend of the soul's immortality: εἰ δὲ μή ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατος, οὐδὲ ἀνάμνησις. εἰ δὲ μὴ τοῦτο, οὐδὲ μάθησις ('if the soul is not immortal, there is no recollection; but if there is no recollection, there is no learning'). The debate between Platonists and critics of the theory of recollection has produced e.g. Tertullian's polemic at *de anima* 24 (see the notes by Waszink (1947), 303–317), perhaps reflecting the influence of a lost work by Albinus. Strato's puzzles are to be found at Dam.I.294; Dam.II.25; 65. Fragments from Plutarch of Chaironeia's defence of recollection occupy sections of Dam.I.275–292 and Dam.II.28. For the vexed question of Plotinus' use of recollection, see Blumenthal (1971), ch. 7; McCumber (1978).

[8] Damascius explicitly links Socrates' critique of sense-perception at *Phd.* 65a9–d3 with the argument from recollection. Both are connected to the second stage of the life of purification, which is characterized by soul's ἑαυτῷ συγγενέσθαι καθαρῷ καθαρῶς. Cf. Dam.I.66.2 and 67.2.

2. *What Does the Argument Prove?*

To begin our exploration, let us take a closer look at how ancient Platonists understood the argument itself to work. As pointed out already, Socrates recommends reading it in conjunction with the argument from opposites; but even this uncontroversial point could not deter interpreters such as Alcinous and Iamblichus from claiming that the argument by itself proves complete immortality. According to Iamblichus, as reported by Olympiodorus, the argument should be construed as follows: 'if learning is always recollection, the soul must be eternal' (Ol.11.2.1–5; *In Phaedonem* fr. 3 Dillon). He would perhaps have pressed Cebes' claim at *Phd*. 73a2–3 that the argument proves the soul to be 'something *immortal*' (my italics) to yield the promise of such a proof. Yet Olympiodorus' summary of Iamblichus' position is cryptic at best, and we lack complementary evidence that could help draw out its meaning. The claim that learning is always recollection plainly states nothing about the post-existence of soul, which is an indispensable condition for immortality in the fullest sense. Even if could be proven that souls have always possessed the knowledge that they recollect by learning (eternity *a parte ante*), this would be no guarantee of their continued existence in the future (eternity *a parte post*). Perhaps Iamblichus would first have deduced the soul's ungenerated nature from the recollection argument (presumably because if all learning is recollection, and recollection the recovery of previous knowledge, the soul cannot have been generated at some particular point of time), which could in turn provide some reason for inferring that soul is likely to continue to exist, and would thus be eternal with respect to both past and future.[9]

A second interpretation, which Olympiodorus (Ol.11.2.5 ff.) ascribes to unnamed 'others', holds that the recollection argument proves the soul

[9] I am here in substantial agreement with Dillon (1973), 241. Alcinous, who discusses the argument at *Did*. 25.3 Louis/177.45–178.12 Hermann, would have agreed with Iamblichus that the argument by itself proves immortality, but this is as far as we can compare his view with Iamblichus'. An important aspect of Alcinous' discussion of recollection is his critique of the Peripatetic method of deriving universal terms from particulars (cf. l. 4: εἰ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἐνενοοῦμεν τὰς κοινότητας κτλ.), a critique reminiscent of sceptical arguments in Sextus, as Dillon has pointed out. Concepts cannot be derived by way of induction from an infinite number of particulars, nor can they be derived from a finite sample, since in that case they would always be vulnerable to falsification, for instance with the generalisation 'all animals breathe', which would be falsified by a non-breathing animal. See Dillon (1993), 152–153. For a discussion of Alcinous' argument for recollection, see Schrenk (1991).

to be 'ungenerated', while the argument from opposites proves its being 'imperishable'. Combining both predicates, ungenerated and imperishable, yields a proof that soul is eternal. I have found no evidence that could tell us who is hiding behind Olympiodorus' 'others', but Socrates' own remarks at *Phd*. 77c–d are strongly suggestive of the view that the combination of the argument from recollection with that from opposites proves the infinite pre-and post-existence of the soul, and may have inspired our unnamed interpreters.[10]

At this point (Ol.11.2.9 ff.), Olympiodorus gives us the opinion of 'the philosopher', who in all likelihood is Proclus. As we remember from the argument from opposites, Proclus is following Syrianus' decision to work closely on the text of the *Phaedo*, and sure enough, his first complaint at Ol.11.2.9 is that the previous two views are not 'at home in the text' (οὐκ οἰκεῖα τῇ λέξει). Each argument by itself does not prove the soul to be immortal, nor does the combination of both amount to such a proof; this is indicated in the text when Cebes says soul has been proved to be 'something immortal' (ἀθάνατόν τι), with the emphasis now on the indefinite τι. Just as the argument from opposites establishes that the soul survives the body for some time, so the argument from recollection shows merely that the soul pre-exists the body *for some time* (προϋπάρχουσαν χρόνον τινα; Ol.11.2.10 f.). Only the final argument in the *Phaedo* proves κυρίως, in the strict sense, that the soul is immortal, arguing as it does from the soul's essence.[11]

Olympiodorus is content to leave the matter where 'the philosopher', Proclus, left it; but Damascius adds a number of refinements (Dam.II.27). We have seen that according to Proclus, as reported by Olympiodorus, the argument proves the soul's pre-existence *for some time* before its embodiment. Yet Damascius' discussion of Proclus' position differs strikingly from Olympiodorus' simpler account. According to Damascius,

[10] Interestingly, however, Proclus' own view sometimes comes close to that of the unnamed 'others'. At *In Parm*. 698.38 ff., he claims that the recollection argument proves the soul to pre-exist the body, and needs to be combined with the cyclical argument, which proves that the soul remains. The passage *could* suggest that the combination of the two arguments constitutes a proof of complete immortality, i.e. that the soul is ungenerated and imperishable, though Proclus does not explicitly draw that conclusion, perhaps for the reasons Olympiodorus gives at Ol.11.2.9 ff.

[11] Ol.11.2.13. But see Philoponus *De aet mund. contr. Procl*. 253.25–254.2 who cites Proclus' *Phaedrus Commentary* (cf. ἐκ τῶν εἰς τὸν Φαῖδρον ὑπομνημάτων) for a different account: the *Phaedo*'s arguments from immortality all derive ἐκ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τῆς ψυχῆς and the argument from self-motion in the *Phaedrus* ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τῆς ψυχῆς.

Proclus in fact held that the argument proves the soul's pre-existence *for an infinite time*; the argument is incomplete only because post-existence is not proved by it:[12]

> Ὅτι τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ ἕπεται, φησὶν ὁ Πρόκλος, προϋπάρχειν ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν τὸν ἄπειρον χρόνον, οὐ μὴν ὅτι καὶ εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα, διόπερ ἀτελὴς καὶ οὗτος· εἰ μὴ ἄρα ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ἀπὸ χρόνου ὑπέστη μετὰ τῶν ἐπιστημῶν. ἀλλ᾽ οὕτω γε οὔτε ἐπίκτητοι ὥστε οὐδὲ ἀφαιρεταί, οὔτε οἴκοθεν προβαλλόμεναι ἀλλ᾽ ἐντιθέμεναι ἔξωθεν, οὔτε μόνον τῶν ἀγαθῶν αἰτιασόμεθα τὸ ποιοῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν κακῶν.
>
> It follows from this argument, Proclus says, that our souls have pre-existed for an infinite time, but not that they will exist for the future as well, and therefore this argument also is incomplete; unless indeed the soul has come to be in time[13] together with its knowledge already present. But on this supposition knowledge is not acquired, and so it cannot be taken away either; nor would it be produced from within but implanted from outside, and we will make the efficient cause responsible not only for goods but also for evil. (Dam.II.27.1–6)

Did Proclus, then, think the argument from recollection proves soul existed for all time past, or only for some time? In his *Parmenides Commentary*, Proclus states that the argument from recollection proves the soul's existence prior to its entering the body, and needs to be combined with the cyclical argument to yield a sufficient proof of immortality.[14] By implication, the argument from recollection is only incomplete in so far as it does not prove post-existence, which would tally in with what Damascius says in the passage quoted above (Dam.II.27.1–6). On the other hand, Olympiodorus' reference to the view of the 'philosopher' cannot be dismissed easily. Perhaps Proclus himself did not decide clearly on whether the argument proves infinite or partial pre-existence; in any case, we have here a cautionary tale on how different Olympiodorus' and Damascius' reports of Proclus' position(s) may turn out to be.

In the passage from Damascius quoted above, we can see in more detail how Proclus would have tackled Simmias' objection at *Phd.* 76c11 f. (εἰ μὴ ἄρα ἅμα γιγνόμενοι λαμβάνομεν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ταύτας τὰς ἐπι-

[12] See Dam.I.297 for the same view, with Damascius' characteristic correction of 'the commentator', i.e. Proclus.

[13] ἀπὸ χρόνου ὑπέστη ('has come to be in time'): cf. Dam.I.242.14: ἀπὸ χρόνου ἤρξατο; Dam.I.297.3: ἀπὸ χρόνου γενομένη.

[14] *In Parm.* 698.38 ff. See also n. 10 above.

στήμας). It is introduced with the clause beginning 'unless indeed …' (Dam.II.27.3). Proclus' response to Simmias' challenge is not easy to reconstruct from Damascius' dense report, but something like the following seems to be his line of thought. If the soul comes to be with its knowledge present, we need to explain forgetfulness. This is made more difficult by the fact that the soul has never properly acquired knowledge, e.g. through a process of learning: it just comes to be with it. But then we need to know how something that has never been acquired could be lost, or, as Proclus has it, be taken away. The obvious answer that the soul forgets its knowledge in the course of its existence will not work, says Proclus, because if the soul comes to be with its knowledge already there, the knowledge must ultimately derive from elsewhere, from an efficient cause that implants it. But if this efficient cause is the reason why soul has knowledge in the first place, it should, by parity of reason, also explain why the soul loses it again. So the same cause must account for both good (knowledge) and evil (forgetfulness) for the soul. The conclusion, we are to infer, is absurd, and therefore the only possibility remaining is that soul has existed for all time.

For Proclus' argument to rule out the possibility that soul has its knowledge implanted by an outside cause but forgets it over time because of its own weakness or foolishness, an assumption is required to the effect that the same cause needs to explain both the presence of knowledge and its absence. This assumption would run counter to a principle that is shared by the *Phaedo*'s characters throughout the dialogue: the same cause cannot produce opposite effects.[15] Perhaps we have here an indication of what Damascius criticises in Proclus' discussion, namely that the latter 'has been carried away into great complexity' (εἰς γὰρ ποικιλίαν ἐξηνέχθη πολλήν; Dam.I.297.5) instead of opting for the simplest solution.

Damascius himself agrees with Proclus that the recollection argument proves the past existence of the soul back to infinity, but does not say anything about its post-existence. When considering what is in essence Simmias' objection (that we may be born with our knowledge already present rather than having acquired it before birth), Damascius makes use of a simpler argument than Proclus and stays much closer to the spirit of Socrates' reply to Simmias:

[15] Cf. *Phd.* 68d–e; 100a–b. I am grateful to the anonymous reader of my draft for pointing out this difficulty with Proclus' argument.

> εἰ δὲ ἀπὸ χρόνου γενομένη μετὰ τῆς ἐπιστήμης γέγονεν ⟨κατὰ οὐσίαν⟩, πῶς ἀποβάλλει αὐτὴν εὐθέως [κατὰ οὐσίαν];[16]
>
> But if the soul comes to be in time and has come to be with its knowledge as part of its essence, how can it 'lose'[17] it right away? (Dam.I.297.3–5)

There are some differences between Damascius and Socrates' reply, but they are largely a matter of terminology, not substance. Rather than talking about knowledge being present at our birth, Damascius refers to the soul's coming to be in time with knowledge as part of its essence. How does the soul come to be in time? On the hypothesis that Damascius is considering, it seems simplest to assume that soul comes to be in time the moment the living organism which it animates is constituted. Once it has come to be with the body, the soul would immediately forget its inborn knowledge, thus leading to the strange situation that the soul both acquires (through coming into being) and 'loses' its knowledge at the same time. Damascius' attempt to rule out a possible challenge to the inference to the soul's pre-existence from the recollection argument is thus very close to Socrates' original reply to Simmias, and more focused on the central problem than Proclus'.

The issue how much the argument proves has led us to some important problems with the argument from recollection. We have already considered Proclus' and Damascius' different ways of rejecting the suggestion that soul may come into being together with its knowledge. There are, however, more sophisticated versions of this theory, which pose equally potent threats to the very attempt to prove the pre-existence of soul. Damascius, for instance, discusses the possibilities that (i) 'we are born possessing the common notions by nature, as irrational animals have

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[16] Following Westerink in transposing κατὰ οὐσίαν to be read with γέγονεν. On this reading, Damascius' thought would be that something belonging to the soul essentially cannot be lost immediately through forgetfulness, but should, we might surmise, instead be as good as inalienable. If left unchanged, the text would read ἀποβάλλει […] κατὰ οὐσίαν. On this alternative reading, Damascius would make the point that a soul, once it has come be in time with its knowledge present, could (absurdly) only lose it in accordance with its essence, since no other factor could be involved in its sudden loss of knowledge (whereas, on the assumption of pre-existence, the explaining factor is the soul's unnatural state of embodiment). Both readings are viable options, although I have a preference for Westerink's construction, which avoids the unusual ἀποβάλλει κατὰ οὐσίαν.

[17] I take it that the notion of 'loss' involved here does not entail *absolute* loss but refers to knowledge becoming inactive or inarticulate because of the soul's embodiment. To avoid confusion, I use apostrophes in contexts where absolute loss of principles, forms or common notions cannot be at issue.

their instincts' (φύσει γεννώμεθα τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας ἔχοντες ὡς τὰ ἄλογα τὰς ὁρμάς; Dam.I.267), and (ii) that souls receive knowledge at birth like the 'particular natures' (αἱ μερικαὶ φύσεις)[18] their 'formative principles'[19] (λόγοι; Dam.II.16).

In response to (i), Damascius points out that it is possible for people to 'lose' (ἀποβάλλει) their 'common notions'[20] through great ignorance, unlike animals and their instincts (Dam.I.267.2–3). Secondly, on the hypothesis that the common notions are like natural instincts, how could they be corrected (διορθοῦται; Dam.I.267.3)? Making a rational judgment requires knowledge of these notions; making a judgment without the aid of reason implies that we must have had knowledge of the common notions and lost it, like critics who have forgotten the standards by which they judge. The ignorant critics are those whose knowledge of the common notions is only dormant and inactivated, while those who judge with reason have an active knowledge of the common notions. The sense in which common notions are unlike instincts, then, is that the former can be perfected from an inarticulate, ignorant state to one of real knowledge (through the activity of recollection, though Damascius does not say so here).[21]

The refutation of theory (ii) takes up more space in Damascius (Dam. II.16), but includes familiar arguments to show that the soul's knowledge cannot be acquired in the same way as the growth-principles of animals and plants (the relevant sense of λόγοι here): (a) a 'particular nature', having received its 'formative principles', uses them at once; but the soul 'loses' its knowledge at once, i.e. at the moment of its embodiment. (b) In any event, how can soul receive it 'in the very turbulence' (ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ κλύδωνι)[22] of birth and 'lose' it when the turbulence is over? (c) If soul receives its knowledge κατ' οὐσίαν, then it cannot have 'lost' it at any time whatever, just as soul cannot 'lose' its life-giving power (*sc.* have it become inert), which it exercises by its mere existence. (d) If

[18] 'Particular natures' are material things in the realm of nature (including animals and plants) brought about by the reason-principles imprinted into matter by the agency of souls. See the note *ad loc.* in Westerink, (1977), 159.

[19] The sense of λόγοι is here tied to the natural world. For more details on how Nature activates these 'principles', see Proclus *In Parm.* 791.29–795.8.

[20] For the role of the 'common notions' in Neoplatonism, see the note in Saffrey-Westerink, *TP* I.159–161.

[21] For a valuable comparison of Plotinus' and Proclus' account of the common notions in physical enquiry, see Van den Berg (2009).

[22] Echoing Plato *Tim.* 43a–44b.

soul has received its knowledge κατὰ ἕξιν, a process of learning must have occurred before. I take the relevant meaning of ἕξις here to be something like a first actuality or a developed (second) potentiality, i.e. knowledge that has been acquired but that is not being contemplated. On this construction, Damascius' objection would be that we are still owed an account of how the soul has proceeded from pure ignorance or first potentiality for acquiring knowledge to a developed potentiality or ἕξις, a transition that can only have been brought about through learning.

Damascius summarizes his refutation of theory (ii) with a more general onslaught on the view that there are two different kinds of knowledge, namely one kind that derives from recollecting later in life the knowledge we have at birth, and another kind that we acquire 'all at once by an insertion' (κατὰ ἔνθεσιν ἀθρόαν), and continue to recollect. If animals receive their instincts by 'insertion' from nature, which constitutes them, souls will also have to receive their knowledge by an 'insertion', on the hypothesis we are considering. But since souls also recollect in later life, we need to distinguish between two kinds of knowledge, a distinction that is both arbitrary and impossible according to Damascius. Arbitrary, because there is no reason why the knowledge developed after birth should come about through recollection of the principles received at birth, but the knowledge gained at birth by way of an 'insertion'; and impossible, because if the soul possesses knowledge only when it has become more perfect through study and inquiry, it is hard to conceive how knowledge can be present at all when soul exists only 'potentially', in its undeveloped state as it were, according to the view of the objectors.[23]

[23] I take this to be the force of Damascius' rhetorical question at Dam.II.16.13 f.: τί χρὴ οἴεσθαι τότε, ὅτε μόνον δυνάμει ἦν κατὰ τὴν δόξαν τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀπορούντων; ('what should we think about that time when the soul existed only potentially according to the opinion of those raising these difficulties?'). Damascius' anti-Peripatetic polemic can be read in the context of Neoplatonic debates over the status of Aristotle's potential intellect. In his (1999) study, de Haas has sketched the various ways in which Aristotle's suggestion that the noetic soul possesses the forms in potentiality (δυνάμει τὰ εἴδη; cf. *De an*. III.4.429a27 ff.), like a tablet that bears no actual writing (430a1: ὥσπερ ἐν γραμματείῳ ᾧ μηθὲν ἐνυπάρχει ἐντελεχείᾳ γεγραμμένον) could be reconciled with Plato, particularly in the case of Philoponus and his concept of a 'third potentiality'. For Philoponus' use of recollection, see also Verbeke (1985). Steel (1997) examines the striking metaphor of soul 'breathing out thoughts' (*In Alc*. 192.2–4) in Proclus' *Commentary on the Alcibiades*, which refers to the inarticulate forms in the soul. The latter are made distinct by recollection through scientific enquiry; Proclus *In Eucl*. 45.16 ff. singles out mathematical studies as especially fruitful in this respect.

3. *What Is Recollection, and How Does It Work?*

With our account of what the argument sets out to prove thus established, we may now turn to defining and unpacking the relevant terms employed in the argument. Damascius defines the central term, recollection, as follows:

> Ὅτι ἡ ἀνάμνησις οὐκ ἔστιν ὀρεκτικῆς, ἀλλὰ γνωστικῆς δυνάμεως ἐνέργεια· οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ πρώτη, ἀλλὰ δευτέρα τοῦ γνωστοῦ ἀνάληψις· οὐδὲ σῳζομένης ἀδιακόπου τῆς μνήμης, ἀλλὰ μετὰ λήθην […]. ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ χωρὶς γνωρισμοῦ, εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἀναπολήσειεν τὸ γνωστὸν καὶ ὃ λέγεται γνωρίσειεν, πρώτη γίνεται γνῶσις, ἀλλ᾽ οὐχὶ ἀνάμνησις.
>
> (a) Recollection is an activity, not of an appetitive, but of a cognitive faculty; (b) further, it is not the primary but the secondary recovery[24] of the object of knowledge. (c) It does not occur when memory is preserved unbroken, but only after forgetting […]; (d) moreover, recollection does not take place without recognition, for if it did not recall to mind the object of knowledge and in that sense recognize it, it becomes primary knowledge, not recollection. (Dam.I.253)

Condensed into a single phrase, at Dam.I.254, the definition with its four constitutive elements (a)-(d) holds that

> Ὅτι συνάγεται ἀνάμνησιν εἶναι ψυχῆς ἐνέργειαν γνωστικὴν δευτέραν μετὰ λήθην ἀναλαμβάνουσαν τὸ γνωστὸν καὶ ὡς οἰκεῖον γνωρίζουσαν.
>
> **D**: Recollection is summed up as being the (b) secondary (a) cognitive activity of the soul which, (c) after oblivion, (d) recovers the object of knowledge and recognizes it as its own.

Olympiodorus' definition of recollection partly overlaps with that of Damascius, but adds more detail on how the process of recollecting takes place. He lists five elements that together constitute recollection (Ol.11.5):

> Recollection occurs when these five elements concur: (i) recollection must be a secondary knowledge: for if recollection is a renewal of memory, and what is renewed has come from what is old, then it is a secondary knowledge; and knowledge comes about either by a primary act of apprehension,

[24] οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ πρώτη, ἀλλὰ δευτέρα τοῦ γνωστοῦ ἀνάληψις: strictly speaking, ἀνάληψις should be translated with 'recovery' when it is qualified with πρώτη *and* δευτέρα. From the context, however, it is clear that Damascius intends a distinction between the primary *acquisition* of an object of knowledge and our (secondary) bringing it to mind again through recollection. Olympiodorus uses slightly different terminology, and describes recollection as a δευτέρα γνῶσις […] κατὰ δευτέραν ἐπιβολὴν (Ol.11.4.7).

> as is the case with learning, or by a secondary, as in the case of recollection. (ii) Secondly, there must be a transition from one kind of knowledge to another, as well as from one object of knowledge to another, for example when someone comes to be reminded of Simmias by seeing Cebes. You then have a transition from one kind of knowledge to another, from sense-perception to the imagination (since it is the role of the imagination to be active about what is absent), but also from one object of knowledge to another, from Cebes to Simmias. (iii) Thirdly, recollection must come about after a period of forgetting has intervened; for if no such interval passes, the result is not said to be recollection, but memory. (iv) Fourthly, the transition takes place either from like to like, or from unlike to unlike: for someone looking at the portrait of Socrates and being reminded by it of Socrates himself passes from like to like, but someone being reminded of Simmias by Cebes passes from unlike to unlike. (v) Fifthly, in the case of the transition from like to like, we can also add what is lacking (δύνασθαί τι καὶ προστιθέναι).

Olympiodorus' summary definition of recollection concludes the scholion (Ol.11.5.16ff.):

> τούτων οὕτως ἐχόντων ἀνάμνησίς ἐστι δευτέρα γνῶσις ἀπὸ γνώσεως ἐπὶ γνῶσιν καὶ ἀπὸ γνωστοῦ ἐπὶ γνωστὸν λήθης διαδραμούσης ἢ ἀπὸ ὁμοίου ἢ ἀπὸ ἀνομοίου τῆς μεταβάσεως γινομένης, καὶ ἡνίκα ἀπὸ ὁμοίου, δύνασθαί τι καὶ προστιθέναι.
>
> **O**: This being the case, recollection is a secondary knowledge [achieved by a transition] from one kind of knowledge to another and from one object of knowledge to another after an interval of forgetting, and the transition begins either from like or unlike, and in the case that it begins from what is like, it is also possible to add something to it [*sc.* in order to supplement the deficiency of the resembling thing in relation to what it resembles].

The material on recollection in Olympiodorus and Damascius is in general agreement; although **D** and **O** look rather different, one could extract a definition of recollection in terms of five elements similar to **O** from material in Damascius (Dam.I.262; Dam.II.13). The commentators, then, agree that recollection is a secondary knowledge, rather than the primary acquisition of knowledge. The constituent elements of recollection support this definition; from the fact that recollection involves a transition in kinds of knowledge and its objects as well as the supplementing of missing elements, it follows that it must be a secondary act of recovering previous knowledge, rather than its first acquisition. As Olympiodorus puts it, 'a man who sees Socrates' portrait but has not seen Socrates himself before cannot go beyond the portrait' (Ol.11.8.4ff.). Plato, according to Olympiodorus, is not interested in every kind of recollection, for

instance seeing Socrates and remembering having seen him before, but only in those cases that involve a transition from like to like, where a transition in kinds of knowledge as well as objects of knowledge takes place (Ol.11.7.8 ff.; 12.2).

The reason for this restriction of the theory lies in the notion of 'making additions to' (προστιθέναι), or 'supplementing'. If we can supplement the deficiencies of a portrait when we are reminded of Socrates by it, we can also supplement the deficiencies of perceptible objects, such as equal sticks and stones, so as to be reminded of the form of the equal in the soul. When being reminded of Socrates from his portrait, the transition between kinds of knowledge moves from perception to the imagination, *phantasia*; in the case of the equal sticks and stones, from perception to *dianoia*. Central to both instances of recollection is the similarity between the sensory input and what is being recollected, whether it be Socrates represented by the imagination or the form or concept of the equal. The five elements that need to concur in the kind of recollection relevant to the argument can thus be transferred directly to cases of learning, effecting the transition from ordinary recollections to recollections of concepts.

4. *What Forms Are Recollected, and Why Do We Need Forms at All?*

We have already discussed the commentators' reasons for rejecting a form of innatism that has the soul come into being with its knowledge already present. As we saw, a crucial step in the argument from recollection rests on the assumption that the elements that are involved in ordinary recollection, as defined by **D** and **O**, are also applicable to cases of learning. When we 'supplement', or 'add something' to, the many equals in this world in order to arrive at a notion of the absolute equal, we recollect the form of the equal, which cannot be gathered from sensibles alone, but must have an existence separate from them. There are at least two major problems with this scenario: firstly, what forms are we recollecting, and secondly, what grounds are there for ruling out alternative explanations of the same process of concept-formation with reference to a process of abstraction rather than the recollection of forms?

Both these difficulties are tackled in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, and they are related significantly. In order to pin down which forms are

relevant to the argument, we need to exclude at the same time all other candidates for recollection, ranging from sensible particulars to transcendent forms. Two scholia are of particular interest here: Dam.I.274 and Dam.II.15. The strategy of Dam.I.274 is to exclude all other explanations of our apprehension that particulars are in some sense deficient, working from the ground up, as it were:

> (i) We do not judge the particulars (τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα) themselves through themselves, since we apprehend them as deficient, and we apprehend *that* they are deficient. (ii) But nor do we refer them to the common qualities in them (τὰ ἐν τούτοις κοινά), for the things common to deficient particulars are themselves deficient, since they have their being in the deficient particulars themselves. (iii) Nor therefore do we refer particulars to the 'later-born' concepts (τὰ ὑστερογενῆ), since abstraction from deficient particulars produces deficient concepts only. It is necessary, then, that the standards of judgment exist prior to the things judged (ἀνάγκη ἄρα τοὺς κανόνας εἶναι πρὸ τῶν κρινομένων). (iv) So perhaps they are in nature; but nature is enmattered too, and does not make clear the essence of forms, in so far as nature is divided and of the form of bodies. (v) But as we must set down soul as prior to nature, i.e. the self-moved before the other-moved, in the same way the forms in the soul (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς εἴδη) are more primordial than those in nature—and what is more, before the self-moved forms come the unmoved ones.[25] The forms that are proper and close to us are the first forms that move, and the transition from sensibles to these is more gradual; (vi) indeed, we pass through these to the intelligible forms (τὰ νοητὰ εἴδη) only after a long time and with difficulty. This is also why Socrates here leads us up to the soul-forms from sensible things by means of recollection—this is clear when he says that the essence of these forms is 'ours'.

This complex passage moves through six different stages, which can be represented schematically as follows:[26]

(i) Sensible particulars
(ii) The 'common qualities' in (i) (τὰ κοινά)
(iii) The 'later-born' concepts (τὰ ὑστερογενῆ)
(iv) Forms in nature (τὰ ἐν τῇ φύσει εἴδη)
(v) Forms in the soul (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς εἴδη)
(vi) Intelligible (transcendent) forms (τὰ νοητὰ εἴδη)

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[25] For other references to 'self-moved' and 'unmoved forms', cf. e.g. Proclus *In Parm.* 979.25 ff. They are forms at the level of self-moving soul and unchanging Intellect respectively.

[26] For another account of the ascent through different levels of knowledge, see also Proclus *In Parm.* 898.12–22.

The passage is most interesting because of the reasons it provides for rejecting sources of knowledge other than forms, and for its use of the central concept of judgment (κρίσις; cf. κρίνομεν in l. 1; κρινομένων in l. 6). In the background to Damascius' remarks stands a history of anti-Peripatetic polemic. If Aristotle attributed a faculty of judgment to sense-perception itself (*post. an.* II.19.99b35), later Platonists were only too eager to present reasons why the ability to judge that one thing is more or less equal than another cannot be derived from any sensible thing, but must derive from within the soul itself. In this respect, the entire strategy of Damascius' passage cited above is well summed up in the phrase 'it is necessary, then, that the standards of judgment exist prior to the things judged' (Dam.I.274.5–6).

Olympiodorus preserves an even more unmistakable polemic against Aristotle at Ol.12.1.17 ff., where he too targets the Peripatetic notion of an innate 'faculty of judgement' which is supposed to explain the activities of 'judging' (κρίνειν) (e.g. that two sensible objects are equal, despite their being only imperfectly equal) and 'distinguishing' (διακρίνειν) (e.g. that one sensible thing is more beautiful than another). According to Olympiodorus, these activities of judging and distinguishing always refer to a 'certain standard and a certain form' (⟨… πρός⟩ τινα ὅρον καὶ πρός τι εἶδος) present within the soul, and cannot be explained by mere instinct, unlike a spider's web making. Secondly, Olympiodorus can refer back to the point made at the outset of his discussion: if recollection is a recovery of knowledge and involves passing from one sort of knowledge to another, such as when a man is reminded of Socrates by his portrait, then it follows that knowledge must already be present in the soul, just as a man must have encountered Socrates before being reminded of him by the portrait. Finally, no natural desire can be in vain; therefore, if the soul aspires to know exact forms, its desire must come about by the presence of these forms within itself.

So much, then, about the idea of 'judgment' in the passage from Damascius quoted above. Let us now look in more detail how he argues that the forms that are recollected are forms in the soul, rather than anything else. That particulars by themselves, under (i), do not supply us with concepts is clear from the *Phaedo* text itself, and does not require much further discussion. The 'common qualities', item (ii), do not seem to be clearly defined, and could in principle include any shared immanent properties. Their role is effectively that of immanent universals, as distinguished from abstracted universals in the mind (iii), and universals before the many particulars, i.e. Platonic Forms (which can be

distinguished further, as in the present passage).[27] According to Damascius, the fault and lack of accuracy of sensible particulars is simply passed on to the properties they share in common, on the grounds that immanent universals have their very being in the particulars. From a passage in Hermias (*In Phdr.* 171.9–13), we can gather that the 'common qualities' fulfil an important intermediary role between sensible particulars and derivative concepts.[28] They provide the 'material' from which the soul's discursive thought goes on to form abstract concepts. Thus, by noticing that Socrates and Plato both share some features in common, the soul's discursive reason articulates these perceived shared properties and develops 'universals', i.e. derivative concepts under (iii), from them. These derivative concepts suffer from the same deficiencies as their material, the common qualities shared by sensible particulars: if we abstract from deficient particulars (via their common qualities), the resulting abstraction will all the same be deficient.

The reasoning here does not immediately convince—why, after all, does the deficiency of particulars have to be passed on to more abstract concepts? The whole point of abstraction, one might say, is to leave out the imperfections of sensible particulars. Worse, Dam.II.15 adds to this that the 'later-born' concepts are in fact 'inferior' (χείρω) even to sense perception. Some light can be shed on the matter by Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary*, which deals extensively with the 'later-born concepts'.[29] If we assume that a concept such as 'man' is derived from the common qualities observable in individual men, the resulting abstraction only captures the general characteristics, never the individual qualities, of the many men. Hence, a predication of the form 'Socrates is man' is deficient, because although it may reveal general qualities Socrates shares with other men (e.g. being a rational mortal animal), it does not capture the other elements that make Socrates who he is. The general principle to be inferred from this critique is the following:[30]

> ἐν γὰρ τοῖς ὑστερογενέσι τὸ καθολικώτερον ἀνουσιώτερόν ἐστιν· ὅθεν καὶ τὸ εἶδος μᾶλλον οὐσία τοῦ γένους.

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[27] On the distinction between three kinds of universals in the ancient commentaries, see the texts collected in Sorabji (2005b), 135–138.

[28] For a defence of Hermias' account of this passsage, see Helmig (2004).

[29] See also Steel (1997), 302–304 for a lucid discussion of Proclus' critique of derivative concepts.

[30] The doctrine that the species has more substance than the genus is originally Aristotelian; cf. *Cat.* 2b7.

> In 'later-born' entities, the more universal a concept is, the less substance it has; which leads to the species having more substance than the genus. (*In Parm.* 894.27–29)

But isn't this, again, the whole point of abstraction? It seems that Proclus' main argument for the deficiency of derived concepts takes its force from a comparison with the universals in our minds that come into play when we think about 'man' in general. The concepts that we actually use, says Proclus, are not simply abstracted general characteristics that cannot take into account individual differentiae; rather, they comprehend unitarily all specific differences and individual properties, not as something potential that is superimposed on the general features, but as already actualized.[31] Such are the forms in our soul, which are more comprehensive and universal than abstraction because they unite particulars in their variety and specificity. The 'later-born' concepts, Platonically understood, are not even derived from particulars, but rather have their source in the activity of soul recollecting its own innate reason-principles, of which the 'later-born concepts' are mere 'images' (εἰκόνες; *In Parm.* 896.26).

After this brief detour, we can now return to our passage from Damascius, and appreciate the reason behind the claim that abstraction from particulars would only yield concepts that are deficient relative to the concrete richness of the forms in the soul. We have still left to explain, however, why we cannot derive the standards of judgment from the forms in nature, i.e. from reason-principles that are immanent in nature (iv). Damascius explains this in terms of Nature's being 'divided and of the form of bodies' (μεριστὴ καὶ σωματοειδής; Dam.I.274.7). Since Nature requires a medium onto which it imprints its own reason-principles, i.e. indeterminate matter, the essence of the forms never emerges clearly as long as it is bound to bodies. From the forms in nature, we must thus move towards the forms in the soul, which are the true objects of recollection.

Damascius' insistence that the transition between levels of reality be gradual is based on well-established Neoplatonic principles; thus, we should not expect to be led up to the transcendent realm of ideas in the *Phaedo*. In the first place, there is no knowledge of transcendent forms,[32]

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[31] Cf. Proclus *In Parm.* 892.20–894.34.

[32] The doctrine is a consequence of taking Plato's *Seventh Letter* seriously; see ch. 5.6 below.

and if there were, it would not be reached without intermediaries. Interestingly, though, Dam.II.15 claims to find at least hints of a possible transition from forms in the soul to transcendent forms in the *Phaedo* text. It is often remarked that Socrates' language is rather loose when he seems to refer to the Form of the Equal with the neuter plural αὐτα τὰ ἴσα at *Phd*. 74c1, as well as with the neuter singular αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον (c5), and a singular abstract noun (ἡ ἰσότης; c2).[33] According to Damascius, 'the equals themselves' at 74c1 refer to the forms in the soul, expressing with the plurality 'the extended nature, as it were, of the soul-forms' (Dam.II.15.8).[34] The possibility of a transition to transcendent forms, on the other hand, is hinted at by the singular 'the equal itself'. The highest kind of recollection, that of transcendent forms, is not however the subject matter of the *Phaedo*. Instead, the dialogue deals predominantly with the kind of recollection that is stirred up by sense-perception. Only in the *Phaedrus*, a more advanced dialogue in the curriculum, do we find recollection on the noetic plane.

5. *Two Puzzles about Memory and Recollection*

While the commentators' definition and analysis of recollection are so far closely tied to Plato's text, their discussion of memory and its relation to recollection reveals the extent to which commentary can become independent philosophical discussion quite beyond any strictly exegetical concerns. According to an etymology shared by Olympiodorus and Damascius, recollection is a 'renewal of memory' (ἀνανέωσις μνήμης; Ol.11.3.3; Dam.I.253.4f.). Does it follow that memory is the more primordial kind of knowledge? If so, does it exist only in souls, or is there a paradigmatic cause of memory in intellect[35] itself?[36] And how are

[33] On the difficulties with this passage, and various attempts to resolve them, see Gallop (1975), 123–125.

[34] τὸ οἷον διαστηματικὸν τῶν ψυχικῶν εἰδῶν: a common spatial metaphor to describe the divided nature of the forms in the soul. The latter, *qua* hypostasis, turns to Intellect and 'translates' the undivided nature of the intelligibles into its own divided mode of existence.

[35] I write 'intellect' in lower case for νοῦς where it is used generically, as is the case in Ol.11.4.9–18 and Dam.I.256. As will become clear, (generic) intellect can in fact be divided into a First Intellect and subordinate intellects.

[36] The paradigm discussion of the question whether memory exists in the Intellect is that of Plotinus, *Enn*. IV.3.25–32; IV.4.1–17. Plotinus rejects the idea memory exists in intelligible reality, on the grounds that nothing external could affect it and no change

memory and recollection related? Proclus' approach, summarized by Olympiodorus in some detail at Ol.11.4.9–18, holds that

> Memory transcends recollection; for memory exists primarily (πρώτως) in intellect, because intellect always thinks itself and remains in itself. Memory exists secondarily in [*sc.* divine] souls, as they pass from one object to another and do not know all things simultaneously and timelessly; and thirdly, memory exists also in our souls, where there is also an interval of forgetting. Memory is like eternity, as being always about the same thing; but recollection is like time because of the transition it involves. There is memory also in beings that do not forget; but recollection occurs only in those where there is forgetting. And the more powerful causes give a share of themselves to a greater number, but the weaker ones give a small share, which is why memory exists also in the irrational animals,[37] but recollection stops at the level of rational souls.

There are two questions about this passage I wish to pursue in the following. Firstly, what is Proclus' theory of memory here, and secondly, why does he restrict recollection to rational souls alone? To begin with the first question, we can clearly see that Proclus, in the above passage, elevates memory to the realm of intellect, where it is said to exist primarily, as the timeless preservation of the same object of thought.[38] The reasoning behind this doctrine appears most clearly at Dam.I.256, which presents an analogy similar to the one we saw in the passage by Olympiodorus quoted above: 'as imperishability is to being and immortality to life, so is memory to knowledge; therefore, memory exists primarily (πρώτως) in intellect, as those other properties do' (ll. 1–2).

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could take place in what is eternal. Cf. *Enn.* IV.3.25.13ff.: μνήμην δὴ περὶ θεὸν οὐδὲ περὶ τὸ ὂν καὶ νοῦν θετέον· οὐδὲν γὰρ εἰς αὐτοὺς οὐδὲ χρόνος, ἀλλ' αἰὼν περὶ τὸ ὄν, καὶ οὔτε τὸ πρότερον οὔτε το ἐφεξῆς, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἀεὶ ὡς ἔχει ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ οὐ δεχόμενον παράλλαξιν ('We must certainly not attribute memory to god, or being, or intellect, for nothing [external] comes to them, and there is no time, but eternity in which real being is, and there is neither before nor after, but it is always as it is, in the same state not admitting of any change'; tr. Armstrong, slightly modified).

[37] The view that irrational natures participate in *nous* is justified by their possession of imagination, memory and sense-perception at *TP* III.23.25–24.1 Saffrey-Westerink: Νοῦ δὲ οὐ μόνον τὰ λογικὰ ζῷα μετέχειν συγχωρήσομεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα γνωστικὴν ἔχει δύναμιν, φαντασίαν λέγω καὶ μνήμην καὶ αἴσθησιν ('We will allow not only that rational animals participate in intellect, but also that all those which have a cognitive faculty, I mean imagination, memory and perception, do so').

[38] It is worth referring here to an etymology that explains 'memory' (μνήμη) in terms of the 'remaining of intellect' (μονὴ τοῦ νοῦ). Cf. Ol.11.3.6, and Westerink (1976), *ad loc.* for further references.

So far, everything seems clear, but matters soon become more complicated. At Dam.I.256, Proclus goes on to qualify his position by conceding that memory exists in intellect 'not in so far as intellect is thinking itself' (οὐ μὴν ὡς ἑαυτὸν νοοῦντι; ll. 3–4), since the objects of intellection are identical with intellect, while what is remembered is present in a different subject.[39] Memory does however exist in intellect 'as always preserving in the same thing the participation in the intelligible part prior to itself' (ὡς ἀεὶ σῴζοντι ἐν ταὐτῷ τὴν μέθεξιν τοῦ πρὸ αὐτοῦ νοητοῦ; ll. 4–5).[40] Proclus, then, wants to explain the apparent stability of knowledge that is characteristic of memory by placing its paradigm in intellect. Unlike intellect, where subject and object of thought are identical, however, memory is characterized by a division between the object that is remembered and the subject which remembers it. Proclus' account of two different 'aspects' of intellect at *ET* 167 provides the key to understanding the sense in which memory can be attributed to intellect.[41] Briefly, Proclus, like Plotinus before him, recognizes a kind of intellect where subject and object are numerically identical, which he calls the First Intellect or the intelligible intellect (νοῦς νοητός). However, unlike Plotinus, Proclus also introduces a series of lower intellects after the First Intellect, which know the intelligibles by participation, in so far as they, by thinking themselves, also participate in what is ontologically prior to them. Proclus' considered view at Dam.I.256.4–5 is to make memory in intellect equivalent to the way in which subordinate intellects think the intelligible prior to them, with which they are not identical but from which they are also never cut off, so to speak.

Damascius refutes this suggestion of Proclus with a series of arguments (at Dam.I.257). Against Proclus' analogy between being-life-knowledge and imperishability-immortality-memory, Damascius suggests that the

[39] The view expressed at Dam.I.256 must be Proclus'. At Dam.I.257.6, Damascius refers back to Proclus' own admission that strictly speaking, intellect does not remember itself with ὥς φησιν, οὐ μέμνηται [*sc.* ὁ νοῦς] as part of his critique of the view that memory exists in intellect in any sense. If Dam.I.256 gives Proclus' view, then it is very likely that the doctrine at Ol.11.4.9–18 also goes back to Proclus. Both texts claim that memory exists 'primarily' (πρώτως) in intellect and rely on similar analogical reasoning.

[40] Note the difference between Olympiodorus' and Damascius' treatments of Proclus' views here: while Damascius reports Proclus as accepting that memory in the Intellect would introduce a duality between the object that is remembered and the subject which remembers it, and therefore weakening his position to the idea of 'preserving participation in intellect', Olympiodorus shows no hint of such subtlety.

[41] On this complex subject, see Dodds (1963), 285–287.

analogue of knowledge in intellect is the negation of ignorance, 'for which there is no name' (ἀνώνυμόν ἐστιν), rather than the preservation of knowledge, i.e. memory. Secondly, Damascius turns against the popular etymology of memory as 'remaining of intellect' (μονὴ τοῦ νοῦ). The kind of permanence that characterises the knowledge of intellect is different in nature from the continued remembrance caused by memory. Knowing the same thing does not also imply remembering it: intellect can do the former without the latter. Finally, and most devastatingly, Damascius can point out that memory implies a distance from the object of knowledge, insofar as memory apprehends and preserves the object of knowledge in some form of imprint (Dam.I.257.6–8).[42] Intellect, on the other hand, is united to the reality prior to it and possesses it, rather than having a memory-imprint of it. Instead, there is to be no memory in intellect, only intellection, 'except in the measure of its separation and departure from what is prior to it' (εἰ μὴ ἄρα κατὰ ἀναλογίαν τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ πρὸ αὐτοῦ διαστάσεως καὶ ἀποστάσεως; Dam.I.257.10f.). In sum, the paradigm of recollection, according to Damascius, is not memory in intellect, but simply intellect's intellection of the same things (Dam.II.7).[43]

There is therefore a marked difference between Damascius' view and that of Proclus.[44] While the latter is emphatic about the aspects of memory that suggest a similarity to unchanging reality, Damascius stresses the distance that is inherent in the relation between an impression preserved in memory and the thing that is causing it. Secondly, Damascius is only willing to admit memory in intellect in so far as it has departed from its prior causes, unlike Proclus, for whom memory is a function of intellect's participation in them.

There is a second interesting aspect to Proclus' views on recollection and memory, namely the question why, in his *Phaedo Commentary*, he restricts recollection to rational souls alone, while allowing that irrational animals have memory. I should say at the outset that our reports of

[42] Cf. the analogy between memory and a wax block at *Theaet.* 191d2–e1.

[43] In his *Philebus Commentary*, however, Damascius does allow that memory exists 'according to intellect in the subjects of intellection' (κατὰ νοῦν ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς) also, which may be a weaker formulation than Proclus' statement that it exists primarily *in* the intellect (*In Phil.* 159.3).

[44] Though the difference between the two may appear less striking if one bears in mind that Proclus himself grants that memory in the strict sense exists in souls only. Cf. Dam.I.257.11ff.

Proclus' position on this matter do not seem entirely consistent. Olympiodorus, who is almost certainly drawing on Proclus' views, claims that recollection stops at the level of rational souls (cf. Ol.11.4.18, quoted above). Elias, however, can quote a passage from Proclus' *Phaedo Commentary* that seems to say the opposite, i.e. that recollection extends to irrational creatures also. Consider the following passage (Elias *In Isag.* 1.2.10–25 Busse, *CAG* 18.1):

> But the philosopher Proclus maintains in his commentary on the *Phaedo* that the irrational animals also have recollection. For, he says, the unchanging nature of knowledge goes beyond the life of these natures, since generally to remember and not forget goes beyond the nature of these irrational animals. For this is not possible [even] for men, who are better. But the irrational animals also forget. For despite having previously fallen into some danger, they fall into the same one again; and those which previously fawned after a lapse of time bark and become angry at those whom they were once used to. From which fact it is obvious that they forget and recollect. That they have recollection, is evident also from the fact that they are not brought into familiarity in the same way with someone they have seen before as with a complete stranger; for a dog is brought more swiftly into familiarity with someone it has seen before, so that it is evident that it has preserved some imprint and that by means of this imprint it has taken up a starting point for recollection. Except that, even if recollection occurs with both men and irrational animals, there is nevertheless a difference of sorts: for in the case of a man, with recollection also comes the awareness (τὸ συναισθάνεσθαι) of recollecting, but in the case of irrational animals it does not, since these are not aware (οὐδὲ γὰρ συναισθάνεσθαι) that they have recollected. For just as sight sees, but does not know that it sees, so it is with them too.

Proclus, in this passage, clearly *defends* the ability of irrational animals to recollect; Dam.II.22 gives an echo of Proclus' view with another example, that of animals 'taking up the same routine again' (πάλιν τὴν αὐτὴν συνήθειαν ἀναλαβεῖν) after forgetting it.[45] The crucial difference that distinguishes human and animal instances of recollection is that of

[45] Did Proclus contradict himself in his *Phaedo Commentary*, or is one of our sources better than the other? Westerink (1976), 155 note *ad loc*. sides with Elias, and conjectures that Olympiodorus' view may have been 'deduced from a canon by Proclus'. Perhaps we do not need to take sides, however. Olympiodorus, when giving Proclus' view, may be referring to recollection in the fullest sense, involving self-consciousness, without going into further details, unlike Elias, who explains how Proclus admitted at least some form of recollection in animals, though of course not in the full, self-conscious sense of human recollection.

self-consciousness (συναίσθησις; cf. συναισθάνεσθαι above in Elias).[46] A further note in Damascius (Dam.I.272) reproduces Proclus' view without further comment, but adds that consciousness is reserved to self-reverting souls, a view that we also find in the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*.[47] But if consciousness serves as a criterion for distinguishing human from animal recollection, would Proclus have held that all instances of human recollections are in fact accompanied by awareness that recollection takes place? Dam.I.269.1 f. gives an interesting discussion of this problem:

> Διὰ τί ἀναμιμνησκόμενοι οὐκ ἐφιστάνομεν ὅτι ἀναμιμνησκόμεθα; καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ πρόσεστι τοῦτο τῇ ἀναμνήσει.
>
> Why when we recollect do we not realize that we are recollecting? For in the present life, this comes together with recollection.

The passage acknowledges that recollection ordinarily involves a degree of reflexive awareness. When I am reminded of Simmias by his portrait, I am also conscious that I am recollecting knowledge that I had already acquired before. With the recollection of forms, one might object, this is not the case: when we come to know the concept of the equal itself, we may not always be aware that we recollect something previously known.[48] How does Damascius explain the lack of reflexive awareness in Platonic recollections? His first move is to deny the premise: awareness does *not* always come with recollection. It is part of the nature of self-consciousness to be 'easily driven into dispersion' (εὐπαθὲς εἰς ἔκκρουσιν; Dam.II.19.5) while 'always turning from one thing to the next'

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[46] Another term for self-consciousness in Damascius is τὸ προσεκτικὸν (Dam.I.269; 271), for which see the note in Westerink (1976), 162. Sorabji (2005a), 145–148 provides a useful survey of the different terms used to describe self-consciousness. There was considerable debate among the commentators whether the 'attentive' (προσεκτικὸν) part of the soul should be treated as a sixth sense, or assimilated to the 'common sense-perception'. Cf. pseudo-Philoponus *In de anima* 3.464.24–465.31.

[47] Particularly interesting on the uniqueness of self-consciousness and self-reversion to the rational human soul is pseudo-Simplicius on *De anima* 425b12 (*In de an.* 187.15 ff. Hayduck; and esp. 187.27 f.): τὸ δὲ αἰσθάνεσθαι ὅτι αἰσθανόμεθα ἀνθρώπου μοι μόνον ἴδιον εἶναι δοκεῖ· λογικῆς γὰρ ζωῆς ἔργον τὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρεπτικόν ('perceiving that we perceive seems to me to be a characteristic property of man only; for the ability to turn back towards oneself is a function of rational life'). The passage may reflect the influence of Iamblichus, whose view that the rational power of sense-perception which turns towards itself is homonymous with that irrational power of sense-perception which turns towards bodies is referred to at 187.37 ff.

[48] Ebert (2004), 203 draws attention to Olympiodorus' and Damascius' comments in this context, but charges them with *petitio principii*. See also Ol.11.8 and Dam.II.19.

(ἄλλοτε πρὸς ἄλλοις ἀεὶ γιγνόμενον; Dam.I.269.5). Because of the shifting nature of self-consciousness, at times we will think that we have acquired knowledge for the first time when we are in fact recollecting. Recollection, therefore, may come about more easily than our awareness of it, and the two are not always in sync. From this acute observation of the way our ordinary, shifting consciousness operates, Damascius moves on to discussing cases where our consciousness is interrupted, e.g. when dreaming or being sick. In such cases, our reflexive awareness is even more seriously affected than in everyday life; thus we are not aware that certain things in dreams are false and impossible (Dam.II.19.3 f.) or in sickness forget what happened when we were in good health (Dam.I.269.7 f.). If these changes are able to affect our self-awareness so significantly, so much more will the 'drastic change' (μεταβολὴ πολλή; Dam.II.19.3) involved in passing into the world of generation.

Nothing in the *Phaedo* would strictly have required discussion of either of these two problems, whether memory exists in the Intellect, and whether animals have recollection. Yet they are far from being merely peripheral. Establishing the correct relation between memory and recollection, and their causes on the plane of intelligible reality, was an important aspect of understanding Plato's text for the commentators.[49] Similarly, the question whether animals have recollection raises the basic problem in what sense human rational activity is distinctive and unique in the universe. The Neoplatonic doctrine of self-reversion (ἐπιστροφὴ πρὸς ἑαυτό) and self-consciousness is thus introduced into the discussion as the ultimate resource for distinguishing human and animal recollection.[50]

[49] Cf. the esoteric debate at Dam.I.260 and Dam.II.8 on whether Dionysus, son of Semele is the efficient cause of recollection (Proclus' view), or whether it should be a more specific deity (Damascius').

[50] Sorabji (1993), ch. 13 argues convincingly that Iamblichus must have played an important role in the move away from Porphyry's willingness to concede rationality in various forms to animals. As we have seen, Proclus follows Iamblichus by restricting recollection with full self-awareness to human beings, while allowing that animals have a capacity for memory, possibly because memory exists primarily in the Intellect, which, as a cause more powerful than Soul, should reach further down the ontological hierarchy. On the larger issue of self-consciousness in the ancient commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*, see now Perkams (2008).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE AFFINITY ARGUMENT IN PLATO'S *PHAEDO*

1. *Introduction*

The argument from the soul's affinity to the intelligible realm is, with a few notable exceptions, generally considered to be the weakest argument in Plato's *Phaedo*.[1] It takes its starting-point from Cebes' suggestion at *Phd.* 70a1 ff., that there is a common fear the soul might disperse at the point of death, when it is separated from the body. Cebes' fear is taken up again by Socrates at 77c6–7 after the recollection argument, with the approval of Simmias who considers as unresolved the question whether the soul will survive death, even if it may pre-exist the body (as the recollection argument would suggest). Socrates' first response is to invite his interlocutors to combine the argument from recollection with the cyclical argument (77c7–d5), which had established that 'everything that is alive has come to be from what is dead' (c8–9).

When the dialectical enquiry takes a new start, Socrates considers the question to what kind of thing it does or does not belong (προσήκει; 78b4.c2–3; 80b7) to be dispersed, and to what kind the soul belongs. The argument, in the order it is presented by Socrates, runs as follows:

[1] Elton (1997) sees an 'object lesson in how not to do good philosophy' (313) in the affinity argument, and connects its supposed failure to Simmias' and Cebes' objections at 84c1–88b8. The analogical method of argument leads to the misology passage at 88c1–91c5, which raises the danger of general mistrust in philosophical arguments (315–316). A more sympathetic approach is taken by Dorter (1976), who considers the affinity argument to be on a par with the argument from design in terms of its intuitive appeal, while expressing reservations about its logical force (298: 'the argument is clearly not intended to be a rigorous one'). Rowe (1991) urges readers of the *Phaedo* to integrate the dialectical part of the argument into the larger context of the discussion. The exhortation to purity at *Phd.* 80c2–84b8 forms part of the whole argument, which is in effect a piece of rhetoric under the guise of dialectics (476). In the most thorough recent analysis, Apolloni (1996) seeks to revindicate the argument as a deductive proof, and assigns 'greater philosophical merit' to it than to the recollection argument or the final argument (7).

(1) Composite things are liable to be dissolved; incomposite things alone are indissoluble, if anything can be (78c1–4).
(2) Composite things are 'different at different times and never constant'; incomposite things are 'always constant and unchanging' (c6–8).
(3) The objects of dialectic (Forms) are unchanging; particulars (objects of perception) are never identical with themselves or identically related to one another (c10–e4).
(4) Forms are invisible; particulars are visible (79a1–8).
(5) The invisible is always constant; the visible never (a9–10).
(6) We are composed of body and soul (b1–2).
(7) The body is more similar to the visible; the soul is more similar than body to the invisible (b4–c1).
(8) The soul has intelligence when by itself alone it is concerned with Forms, and is confused when dealing (through the body) with particulars (c2–d7).

Therefore,
(C1) The soul is more similar to everlasting unchanging being than to its opposite (d8–e5).

[Supplementary argument] (79e8–80a5)
(S1) Soul rules the body; the body is the slave of soul.
(S2) The divine naturally rules, the mortal is naturally subject.

Therefore,
(C2) We are composed of (a) the soul which is most similar to what is divine, immortal, indestructible, of a single form, accessible to thought, ever constant and abiding true to itself; and (b) the body which is most similar to what is human, mortal, destructible, of many forms, inaccessible to thought, never constant nor abiding true to itself. (80a10–b6)

Therefore,
(C3) Body is liable to be quickly dissolved; soul must be completely indissoluble, 'or something close to it' (ἢ ἐγγύς τι τούτου; 80b10).

Do the three conclusions (C1–3) follow from the premises? From (5), (1) and (2), it follows that invisible things are unchanging, unchanging things incomposite, and incomposite things indissoluble (and the converse for visible things). Socrates' interlocutors accept that Forms are invisible (4) as well as unchanging (3). By implication, they would also

have to accept that Forms are incomposite and indissoluble. Socrates singles out three points of resemblance between soul and Forms. Firstly, both are invisible. Secondly, when the soul gains clear knowledge by intelligence, it deals with the Forms; when dealing with sense-objects, it is liable to be confused. From this, an affinity of soul with the eternal and unchanging is concluded.[2] Thirdly, by the supplementary argument (S1–2), the soul is also more like the divine, since it rules the body, just as the divine is naturally in command.

By the three points of resemblance Socrates mentions, the conclusions expressed in C1 and C2, that soul has a greater resemblance with the indestructible (and invisible …) than with its opposite follow—but is this enough to prove its immortality? If resemblance admits of degrees, the soul may be merely relatively indestructible as compared to the body. Indeed, one of the argument's conclusions (C3) seems disappointingly feeble, as if Socrates were deliberately encouraging Cebes' later doubts: the soul is 'completely indissoluble, or something close to it' (80b10). On the most natural reading of this phrase, the argument from affinity has only proved that the soul is longer-lasting than body, but not that it is immortal.[3]

In the following, I will mainly be concerned with how the Neoplatonic commentators understand the logic of the argument from affinity and defend it against critics like Strato. Before turning to their detailed interpretations of the relevant section of the *Phaedo*, however, I will begin with some comments on how earlier Platonists made sense of the argument.

2. *Alcinous, Plotinus and Porphyry*

There is very little that needs to be said about Alcinous, who, at *Did.* 25.1 Louis/177.18–35 Hermann, gives a summary of the affinity argument that reflects the textbook nature of his work. The argument is presented as a full proof of immortality, and the use of comparatives that we find in Plato dropped completely. According to Alcinous, soul is thrown into confusion by its contact with the body (cf. *Phd.* 79c7); hence it cannot have kinship with the body. Only when it rests in the intelligible realm

[2] Presumably by way of a principle such as 'like is known by like', as Gallop (1975), 140 points out.

[3] For a more detailed discussion of Socrates' conclusion, cf. Gallop (1975), 142 and Rowe (1991).

does it reach calm; but the intelligible is by nature indispersible and indestructible; hence the soul, being akin to the intelligible, would be indispersible and indestructible also. Alcinous briefly summarizes the supplementary argument at *Phd.* 79e7 ff., and moves from the soul's capacity to rule the body to its closeness to the divine, to soul's being imperishable and indestructible.

More rewarding than Alcinous is Plotinus' perspective on the argument. At *Enn.* IV.7.10.1 ff., he is specifically concerned to show that soul is akin to the 'more divine and eternal nature' (τῇ θειοτέρᾳ φύσει συγγενὴς ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τῇ ἀιδίῳ; ll. 1–2). Soul, when it has purified itself, has all the best things inside itself, wisdom and all other virtues (ll. 12–13). Since wisdom and true virtue are divine things, they could not be present to a base mortal thing, but only to something of a divine nature, which shares in divine things 'through kinship and sameness of essence' (διὰ συγγένειαν καὶ τὸ ὁμοούσιον; l. 19). What Plotinus presents is not strictly speaking a proof of immortality; instead, he uses Platonic themes to emphasize the proximity of pure soul with the reality above it. Nonetheless, his remarks illustrate that the affinity argument could be taken in the strongest possible terms, as not simply arguing that the soul's essence is like the divine but that it is of the *same* essence (cf. διὰ [...] τὸ ὁμοούσιον).[4]

Of substantial interest are the fragments from Porphyry's work *Against Boethus*, which are preserved in Eusebius' *Preparation of the Gospel* (*PE*). After quoting at length from Socrates' exposition of the argument in the *Phaedo*, Eusebius turns to Porphyry who 'explains the meaning' (ἐξαπλοῖ δὲ τὴν διάνοιαν; *PE* XI.27.20.1) of Plato, presumably in response to criticisms of the argument from a certain Boethus. Unfortunately, there are reasons for fearing that 'the substance of Boethus' counter-argument [*sc.* to Plato's affinity argument] has been omitted by our sources', as Gottschalk puts it.[5] Eusebius is reproducing the passages from Porphyry's *Against Boethus* for a reason: he wants to demonstrate the agreement between Platonist immortality and the doctrine of Moses. For his purposes, the details of Boethus' critique are only peripheral; what matters is the common ground between the pagan philosophers regarding the nature of the soul. At *PE* XI.28.6.1 f., Eusebius introduces a section from the beginning of Boethus' critique, which is designed to 'detract from

[4] Proclus refutes the idea that soul is of the same essence as the divine at *In Tim.* III.231.5–10.

[5] Gottschalk (1986), 247.

the force of this argument' (τούτου τοίνυν τοῦ λόγου τὴν δύναμιν περιαιρῶν; XI.28.6.1). Boethus makes the following four main points, which I give in paraphrase below:

1. XI.28.7–8.1: In order to prove that the soul is immortal and stronger than perishable nature, 'one needs to face and circle around many arguments' (πολλοὺς ἀναμείναντα χρὴ καὶ περιηγησάμενον λόγους; XI.28.8.1).
2. XI.28.8.2–9.1: One would not need much discussion to believe (οὐ πολλῆς ἄν τις δεηθεὶς πραγματείας πιστεύσειεν; XI.28.8.2 f.) that nothing about us is more like God than the soul, because of the continuous and unceasing motion which it generates within us, and the intellect that belongs to it.
3. XI.28.9.1–10.1: This is what the natural philosopher from Croton[6] also considered when he said that soul is immortal and by its nature flees from all kinds of rest, like the divine [*sc*. heavenly] bodies.
4. XI.28.10.1–10.4: A 'great likeness to god' (πολλὴ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὁμοιότης; XI.28.10.2–3) would manifest itself to someone who has grasped the idea of soul, and the activities of the *nous* within us.

Apparently, Boethus makes a distinction between proving the immortality of soul in general (1), which requires many arguments, and the idea that the soul is like the divine, which is grasped as soon as the idea of soul is understood (2–4). Boethus, as he is reported here by Eusebius, does not disagree about the conclusion of the affinity argument (that soul is akin to the divine and immortal), but rather questions its usefulness. Of course the soul can do marvellous things, but does that constitute a *proof*?

Immediately following, at *PE* XI.28.11, Eusebius seems to give us more of Boethus' thought, introduced with the words καὶ ἑξῆς ἐπιλέγει, which ought to have Boethus as their subject. For my purposes, the most interesting passage is the opening paragraph:

> Εἰ γὰρ ὡς ὁμοιότατον τῷ θείῳ πάντων χρημάτων ἡ ψυχὴ δείκνυται, τίς ἔτι χρεία τῶν ἄλλων δεῖσθαι λόγων εἰς ἀπόδειξιν τῆς ἀθανασίας αὐτῆς προοιμιαζόμενον καὶ μὴ καὶ τοῦτον ὡς ἕνα μετὰ τῶν πολλῶν καταριθμοῦντα, ἱκανὸν ὄντα ἐντρέψαι τοὺς εὐγνώμονας, ὡς οὐκ ἂν τῶν ἐμφερῶν τῷ θείῳ μετέσχεν ἐνεργειῶν μή τοι θεία γε οὖσα καὶ αὐτή;

[6] Alcmaeon of Croton. For evidence of his argument for the soul's immortality, cf. Aristotle *De an*. 405a29, and Diels-Kranz A12 for other testimonia.

> If it has been shown that the soul is of all things most like the divine, what further need is there to demand the additional arguments to demonstrate its immortality for one who has stated this at the outset of his exposition and not treated it as one argument among many, seeing that it is sufficient to force men of sound mind to admit that the soul would not partake of godlike activities if it were not itself divine?
>
> (*PE* XI.28.11.2–12.1; tr. Gottschalk)

There is an element of uncertainty here regarding the subject of the participles προοιμιαζόμενον and καταριθμοῦντα. If the fragment is by Boethus, as Eusebius' text would require, then who is he attacking? One could think that Boethus is targeting Socrates in the *Phaedo*: why would Socrates introduce arguments to make his case for immortality, if he already takes it for granted that the soul has divine activities, such as knowing the truth about things, in his 'second defence' speech? Yet it is difficult to see in what sense Socrates in the *Phaedo* refuses to count the soul's likeness to the divine as one argument among many. In my view, the details of the passage can be better accounted for if we attribute the fragment to Porphyry rather than Boethus. The point would then be this: Boethus somewhere at the beginning of his treatise refuses to accept that the argument from affinity is a conclusive proof, and demands other arguments for immortality. All the same, he accepts that the soul can partake of godlike activities. Exactly this is what we found in the genuinely Boethan fragment at *PE* XI.28.8. For Boethus, the soul's likeness to the divine is not in doubt—but it has no demonstrative force, and thus is of no help for the laborious task of circling around the many arguments that would be required for a real proof of immortality.[7]

The final sentence in the passage from Porphyry quoted above (ὡς οὐκ ἂν τῶν ἐμφερῶν τῷ θείῳ μετέσχεν ἐνεργειῶν μή τοι θεία γε οὖσα καὶ αὐτη) sets out to give the reason why Boethus' position is illogical. Once he admits that the soul can engage in divine activities, Boethus cannot also resist the inference that its essence must be like the divine also. From the fragments that Eusebius assigns to Porphyry at XI.28.1–3, it appears that the inference from the soul's activities to its essence plays a crucial role in Porphyry's own construction of the argument. According to Porphyry, the argument employs a particular method of proof, according to the following principle: take any two terms that are obviously at the

[7] Cf. Gottschalk (1986), 248–249; Sodano (1993), 145–147. See also pseudo-Simplicius *In de an.* 247.23 ff. for Boethus' attack on the final argument in the *Phaedo*.

extreme ends of a single scale.[8] Now take any third thing and decide to which of the two opposite sides it belongs. The two extreme ends are the 'divine constitution, which is unmixed and unharmed' (ὄντος οὖν θείου συστήματος καὶ ἀκηράτου καὶ ἀλυμάντου; *PE* XI.28.3.1 f.), and 'the earthly side, which is dissoluble and remains at variance' (ὄντος […] τοῦ χθονίου καὶ λυτοῦ καὶ ἐν διαφθορᾷ κειμένου; l. 3). Soul, according to Porphyry, is 'in no way' (οὐδαμῶς) like the mortal side of the scale, but has all the properties characteristic of the upper end (it is like the divine, immortal, invisible, intelligent, and all other properties given to the intelligible by Plato). It follows, then, that soul must also have a similar essence as the divine, since it is this essence which is the cause of soul's having all the same properties as the divine. Things that are unlike God in their activities are also unlike God in their essences; and so likeness of activities will also imply likeness of essence.[9]

3. *Iamblichus*

So far, we have seen that Alcinous considers the argument from affinity to be conclusive, while it is only with Porphyry that some attempt is made to explain its logic. Iamblichus, too, considered the argument to prove complete immortality. His position can be put into context with the following remark by Olympiodorus:

> The commentators ask whether this argument proves the immortality of the soul. Now all the other commentators say that only the argument from the essence of soul proves its immortality. The argument from recollection has assuredly shown that the soul exists prior to the body, not, however, that it exists always; the present argument proves on the basis of likeness that the soul is post-existent because more indissoluble, and that it survives longer because more durable, but not also that it is immortal.
>
> (Ol.13.4.1–6)

The larger purpose of Olympiodorus' remark here is to single out Iamblichus' interpretation (see below) as aberrant: all the commentators

[8] *PE* XI.28.2.1–4: ὅταν γὰρ δύο τινῶν ἄκρων ἐναργῶς ἐναντίων, οἷον λογικοῦ τε καὶ ἀλόγου, ἄλλο τι ἀμφισβητῆται ποίας ἐστὶ μερίδος, εἷς ἦν καὶ οὗτος τρόπος ἀποδείξεως διὰ τοῦ δεῖξαι τίνι τῶν ἀντικειμένων ὅμοιον ('for when there are two extreme terms that are obviously contraries, such as rational and irrational, and the question is to which side some third thing belongs, this will be one method of proof, by showing to which opposite term it is like.').

[9] *PE* XI.28.5.1–5.

agree that the final argument alone proves the soul's immortality; only Iamblichus takes a maverick path. In fact, however, the few shreds of evidence that we can collect from Platonists such as Alcinous or Porphyry would suggest that Iamblichus' approach is continuous with an earlier tradition. Indeed, as we will see, Iamblichus himself presented his interpretation as an extrapolation from Plotinus, perhaps not without reason. One may therefore suspect that Olympiodorus exaggerates the degree of consent among the commentators to establish as orthodox a view that may only have been formed in reaction to Iamblichus.

How did Iamblichus understand the argument? Since the relevant passage raises a number of difficulties, it will be best to produce it in full here:

> The philosopher Iamblichus, however, will have it that this argument [*sc.* from affinity], too, proves the complete immortality of the soul (τελείαν ἀποδεικνύναι τὴν ἀθανασίαν τῆς ψυχῆς). (**A**) As far as the argument from affinity goes, [Iamblichus] says, Plato has proved the soul more durable, but from the assumptions made in the text its immortality can be inferred. (**A1**) In them the soul is described as non-composite (78c1–9) and (**A2**) as having mastery over the body (79e8–80a6); now Plotinus has rightly taught that (**B**) whatever perishes must perish from either of these two causes, (**B1**) because it is composite, or (**B2**) because it is in a substrate: incorporeal things perish because they are in a substrate, bodies because they are composite. If then (**C1**) the soul is neither composite (this is how Iamblichus argues, and it is also indicated in the text, which nowhere speaks of 'invisible', but only of 'incomposite', the two being apparently considered identical) (**C2**) nor present in a substrate, since it has mastery over the body, endows it with life and is the cause of its own motion, there will be no manner in which it can perish, neither as composite nor as present in a substrate. (Ol.13.4.6–18; tr. Westerink, modified)

Perhaps the first thing to note about this passage is that it reports an eminently sensible approach to explaining philosophical arguments. Iamblichus makes a salutary distinction between what the text proves directly, that soul is more durable than the body, and what can be drawn out from the premises contained in the text, namely a complete demonstration of immortality.[10] Iamblichus, in spite of his image as high-flying

[10] Olympiodorus' parenthetical remark that the *Phaedo* 'nowhere speaks of "invisible" but only of "incomposite", the two being considered identical' is puzzling as it stands. Although Socrates does not get Cebes to *say* that soul is 'invisible', the latter's concessions that it is 'not seen by men' and 'not visible' surely come down to the same thing. See Westerink (1976), 174 for a tentative auggestion how the passage might be remedied.

metaphysician with little time for textual details, is at least in this case well able to combine intellectual ambitiousness with careful exegesis.

In order to pursue Iamblichus' interpretation of the affinity argument further, however, something must be said about the role of Plotinus in this passage. Did Iamblichus himself base his argument, that everything perishes either in virtue of being composite or by existing in a substrate, on Plotinus, or is Olympiodorus' source (i.e. Syrianus-Proclus) paralleling Iamblichus' argument with an interpretation of Plotinus? In other words, is the sentence beginning at Ol.13.4.10 (κάλλιστα δὲ τῷ Πλωτίνῳ ἥρεσεν) part of Iamblichus' commentary, or rather a helpful lecturer's attempt to set Iamblichus' strategy into a wider Neoplatonic context?[11] Strangely, when Damascius reports Plotinus' argument, he does not mention Iamblichus at all. Dam.I.311 simply restates the argument briefly, and claims that the relevant *Phaedo* section provided Plotinus with the 'starting-points' (ἀφορμαί) for his own argument. Since we know that Damascius' point of departure is Proclus' commentary on the *Phaedo*, it would indeed appear that Proclus himself accepted Plotinus' argument as a valid interpretation of the *Phaedo* passage. So it might seem as though Proclus was drawing a parallel between Plotinus and Iamblichus. One piece of evidence, however, rules out this possibility. At Dam.II.29, after a more detailed exposition of the Plotinian argument, Proclus complains that the argument does not suffice for a 'proof of complete immortality' (πρὸς τελέαν ἀθανασίαν). Yet Plotinus nowhere makes such a claim. On the other hand, we know from the previous arguments that confident claims of this sort capture the essence of Iamblichus' exegesis. Therefore, it is more likely that it was Iamblichus who attempted to claim Plotinus'

[11] Westerink rightly notes that there is no precise equivalent for the dichotomy 'perishable in virtue of being composite or by existing in a substrate' in Plotinus, although it later occurs in Proclus. For the dissolubility of compounds, see, however, *Enn.* IV.7.12.12–13: πᾶν τε τὸ λυόμενον σύνθεσιν εἰς τὸ εἶναι εἰληφὸς ταύτῃ διαλύεσθαι πέφυκεν, ᾗ συνετέθη ('everything that has been bound together and has received its existence by way of composition is naturally disposed to be dissolved in the same way it has been brought together'); and *Enn.* IV.7.12.17–19 for perishability in a substrate: ἀλλ' ἡ ἀλλοίωσις φθείρουσα τὸ εἶδος ἀφαιρεῖ, τὴν δὲ ὕλην ἐᾷ· τοῦτο δὲ συνθέτου πάθος ('but destructive change takes away the form and leaves the matter, and undergoing this affection is characteristic of compounds'). Plotinus' conclusion at ll. 19–20 suggests a method of argument similar to the one Iamblichus ascribes to Plotinus: εἰ οὖν κατὰ μηδὲν τούτων οἷόν τε φθείρεσθαι, ἄφθαρτον εἶναι ἀνάγκη ('if, then, it cannot be destroyed in any of these ways, it is necessarily imperishable') (all translations by Armstrong). Proclus (*ET* 48 and 187) employs the dichotomy with more precision.

authority for his reading of the affinity argument. In Damascius' commentaries, Iamblichus' name then drops out for reasons we do not know, and is attributed directly to Plotinus.[12]

4. *Proclus' Analysis of the Argument*

Proclus, as we would expect, is not willing to accept Iamblichus' ambitious reading of the affinity argument. The central disagreement between Proclus and Iamblichus, however, does not primarily concern questions of textual exegesis, but rests on a conceptual point. According to Proclus, the possibility that soul may enter another more long-lived body after its first separation from a bodily substratum, and perish with it, shows that the argument does not prove complete immortality:

> οὐ μὴν ἀρκεῖν γε τὸν λόγον φησὶν Πρόκλος πρὸς τελέαν ἀθανασίαν· τάχα γὰρ ἂν εἴη, φησίν, ἐν ἄλλῳ σώματι τῷ μὴ ὁμοίως τούτῳ διαφθειρομένῳ, ὥστε κἂν μὴ φθείρηται ὡς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ τούτῳ τῷ σώματι, ἀλλὰ ἐν ἑτέρῳ γε, φησίν, οὐδὲν κωλύει αὐτὴν ἐνοῦσαν διασῴζεσθαι πλεῖστον χρόνον.
>
> But Proclus says that the argument is not sufficient for a proof of complete immortality; for soul may inhere in another body, one which does not perish in the same way as this one does, so that even if the soul will not perish on the grounds that it inheres in this bodily substrate, nothing prevents it from surviving for a great span of time by inhering in another substrate. (Dam.II.29.7–11)

According to Proclus, even if one assumes that the argument from affinity proves the soul's greater durability, this may be accounted for by soul's moving from a material body from which it is separable to a different body from which it is inseparable (this is the force of ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ in the passage above, as used by Aristotle at *Cat*. 1a24–25). This last body may be more durable than the material body and may not perish in the same way as the latter does (e.g. through disease and old age). Still, one cannot rule out the possibility that even a body that is more lasting than our common material body has a way of perishing peculiar to itself. Thus, after a great span of time, the soul may come to perish along with this second, more durable body from which it cannot be separated.

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[12] Cf. Dillon (1973): 'it is clear from our passage in Ol. that Iamblichus quoted Plotinus to support his case …' (242).

The wider context for Proclus' objection to construing the argument from affinity as a complete proof of immortality is worth bringing out more fully here. When he is referring to 'a body which does not perish in the same way as this [*sc*. material] one does', we can take Proclus to refer to the pneumatic vehicle, whose survival or otherwise after death was a matter of considerable controversy among different interpreters of Plato, as a well-known doxography in the *Timaeus Commentary* shows (*In Tim*. III.234.8–238.26, commenting on 41d1). According to Proclus, the pneumatic vehicle is tied to the irrational soul. Upon death, irrational soul can be separated from the physical body and continue to exist in the pneumatic vehicle for a number of incarnations, until it has been shed by a completely purified rational soul and may come to dissolve into its elements. But if Iamblichus' 'Plotinian' argument were a complete proof of immortality, it would not only apply to the rational soul, but also to the irrational soul, since both are incomposite and separable from the body as a substrate. Proclus, attempting to resist this conclusion, objects that being separable from a physical body need not entail being separable from any kind of body, so that the possibility that irrational soul might perish with its pneumatic vehicle remains open.

These considerations, then, stand behind Proclus' decision to downgrade the argument to proving merely that the soul exists longer than the body. Both Olympiodorus and Damascius agree on the general strategy of the argument, and, on the basis of the considerations I have set out in my introduction, I think it is likely that they preserve the substance of Proclus' own view: if the soul is closer to intelligible reality, yet even bodies, which are closer to the sensible world, survive death for a certain amount of time, the soul will *a fortiori* survive death longer than the body (Dam.II.31.2–3; Ol.13.3.21–23). Plato thus begins by dividing our 'composite nature' (σύστασις) into soul and body, and inquires which is more like the indissoluble, soul or body (Ol.13.3.1–2). Three arguments prove that soul is more like the indissoluble than the body: (i) the argument from its invisible nature, (ii) from its discursive thought and (iii) from its mastery over the body (ll. 2–3).[13] Characteristically for his exegetical

[13] See also Dam.I.325 and II.31–33 for more concise statements of the three arguments. I am here passing over the commentators' detailed discussions of the six properties of the divine that feature in the *Phaedo* text, as not directly pertinent to their understanding of the structure of the argument. See, however, Ol.13.2; Dam.I.312–324; Dam.II.30. Cf. also Proclus *TP* I.113–119 Saffrey-Westerink, a passage that forms part of his attempt to systematize divine attributes gathered from different Platonic dialogues.

method, Proclus relates these three arguments to the hypostasis of soul, to (a) being, (b) knowledge and (c) life respectively.[14] The invisible is characteristic of being, while the argument from soul's ability to reason is drawn from knowledge. Soul's mastery over the body relates to life, in so far as soul rules the body as its form-giving principle and self-moving thing. Lower kinds of soul do not fulfil these life- and form-giving functions, because they are inseparable from their respective substrates. Thus, the irrational soul is itself the life of the pneumatic body, and the vegetative soul the life of the coarsest kind of body (ll. 5–12).

The soul, then, is shown to have three properties that belong more to indissoluble things than to their opposites. Proclus next divides the argument into three syllogisms (Ol.13.3.12–24):

A1: Soul is in all respects (κατὰ πάντα) more like the indissolubles than the body.
A2: What is in all respects more like the indissolubles is more indissoluble.
A3: Therefore the soul is more indissoluble.

B1: What is more indissoluble lasts longer than the body.
B2: Therefore the soul lasts longer than the body.

C1: What lasts longer remains after the separation, since even bodies themselves do not immediately perish, but remain for some time.
C2: Therefore the soul remains for some time after the separation and is not immediately dispersed and dissolved on leaving the body.

There are a number of unargued assumptions underlying Proclus' construal. To begin with, it is not obvious that the three respects in which soul resembles the indissolubles validate the inference that soul resembles them 'in all respects'. Perhaps part of Proclus' attempt to link the structure of the argument to the triadic structure of the hypostasis soul was motivated to facilitate the inference, however. If being, intelligence and life are what defines soul's place in the universe absolutely, one might accept that likeness in these three respects amounts to likeness in all respects. There remains, however, the worry that likeness to x may not always entail actual possession of x, a difficulty which ancient objectors to the *Phaedo* did not ignore. I will discuss some of the more detailed

[14] Cf. P. Hadot (1960) for the larger Platonic background to this triad.

objections to the key inference in the affinity argument in more detail below. The conclusion to the affinity argument, as we see in C2, merely states that the soul survives death longer than the body, whose decay, moreover, can be slowed down through embalming. Note that Proclus is careful throughout to keep the comparatives in place, and differs significantly not only from Iamblichus, but also from Porphyry in his more guarded construction of the argument.

5. *Damascius' Critique of Proclus*

Having outlined Proclus' analysis of the affinity argument, the next question to tackle is the relation between Proclus and Damascius in this section of the commentaries. What are Damascius' criticisms of Proclus, and do they deal with fundamental philosophical issues, or are they mere refinements? Are we right to expect Damascius to give the better reading of the argument?

There are two strong points in favour of Damascius' response to Proclus. Firstly, Damascius is willing to break with Proclus' assumption that the 'Plotinian' argument formulated by Iamblichus presents a good interpretation of Plato's text. As we have seen, Plotinus' argument takes as its general premise that there are two modes of death and destruction (being composite and existing in a substrate), neither of which affects the soul, since it is incomposite and separable. Damascius categorically refers us back to the text; Plato does not talk about the two modes, nor does he even attempt to prove the same thing as Plotinus (Dam.I.311.5–8). Instead, Plato sets out to prove only 'that the essence of the soul is longer lasting than that of the body because it is more like what is immortal' (ll. 7–8).

But according to Damascius, Proclus is not only mistaken in accepting Iamblichus' 'Plotinian' argument as a valid reading of Plato's text; his critique of the 'Plotinian' argument is flawed also. As we have seen, Proclus does not accept the argument as a full proof of immortality, on the grounds that soul may be separable from its material body which it survives, but inseparable from a more lasting, finer body, with which it could perish. But, one may object, if the first separation does not destroy the soul, why should the second? Accordingly, Damascius charges Proclus with not having grasped the force of Plotinus' argument (as transmitted through Iamblichus), which leads to the conclusion that soul is separable from any body whatsoever (Dam.I.311.9–10).

Nonetheless, on Damascius' interpretation, there remains one crucial respect in which the argument is not a complete demonstration of immortality. Nothing in the argument rules out the possibility of soul becoming exhausted over a long time 'even while existing by itself' (Dam.I.311.10–12). The same worry that Cebes brings up against Socrates' argument from affinity at *Phd*. 86e–88b will recur in Damascius' discussion of the final argument from the essence of soul.[15] Regrettably, nothing in the commentaries hints at how he would have solved the problem. Proclus' explanation of how soul, as a mixture of the ungenerated and generated, can be immortal is to connect it to its higher causes (*In Tim*. II.124.10–125.9). In so far as soul participates in them, it will always be replenished by a power outside itself, and so partake in an adventitious immortality, just like the universe. Since the commentaries do not discuss Cebes' objection in any detail, however, there is no way of telling precisely how the weaver analogy would have been dismantled.

6. *Three Objections to the Argument*

What objections to the argument made their way into the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, how were they dealt with, and how do they compare with difficulties which we moderns may have? Three problems in particular elicit discussion in Olympiodorus and Damascius: they each attempt to challenge the crucial inference from being like what is (more) indissoluble to being (more) indissoluble with counter-examples. Hostile critics, such as Boethus or Strato, may have first raised these worries; but the context in which these problems were raised, and by whom, is not preserved in the text.

The 'dog objection' opens the series of problems discussed at Ol.13.6, and appears to take two different forms in the commentaries. The first, simplest version is discussed in Dam.II.41, and poses the following question: how can one infer from F's being *like* x to its simply *being* x (in the case of soul, from its being like the indissoluble to its being indissoluble)? If a wolf is like a dog, the wolf is not itself a dog. Damascius' response to the problem is twofold. Firstly, he points out that resemblance is qualified in respect to something. Thus, the argument's conclusion that soul *is* more indissoluble *than the body* follows from its being more *like* the indissoluble *than the body* is (ll. 2–3). The dog objection, in other words,

[15] Dam.II.78.28 f. See ch. 6.4 below.

caricatures Plato's actual argument, which is about F's greater likeness to x as compared to G. The second response Damascius offers to the objection holds that soul's likeness to the indissoluble is 'in accordance with its essence', rather than an 'external shadow', as the likeness of a dog to a wolf (ll. 3–4).

Version two of the dog objection can be found at Ol.13.6, and adopts a more sophisticated line of attack: if soul is indissoluble in virtue of being more like the indissoluble than the body, then a dog will be a wolf, since a dog is more like a wolf than a horse. Olympiodorus' ingenious response is to charge the objector with ignorance of the 'method of the argument' (ἡ ἀγωγή τοῦ λόγου). The affinity argument hinges on the idea that the soul is more indissoluble than the body, which, according to Olympiodorus, implies that the body too must be indissoluble, most likely in the sense that it survives as elemental stuff. Both the soul and the body thus share the common property of being indissoluble, but possess it in different degrees, whereas 'the dog without being a wolf is more like the wolf than a horse' (ll. 3.-6).

A second problem points to the relation between form and matter in order to argue that likeness to the intelligible does not always entail a greater degree of indissolubility. According to the objection, if form is more like the indissoluble and intelligible than matter, and it is possible to infer from F's having greater likeness to x (as compared to G) to F's being x, then form also *is* more indissoluble than matter (Ol.13.6.6–10). But if a living body perishes, its constituent matter is imperishable, while its form perishes. Hence, the affinity argument leads to a false conclusion in the case of form and matter. Matter, it turns out, is more imperishable than form, not the other way round.

We find two different solutions to the problem in Proclus, both of which try to explain in what respects form and matter are like and unlike the indissoluble, in order to deconstruct the possible counter-example. First, he explains the fact that matter survives form by claiming that enmattered forms 'do not have mastery' over matter (Dam.I.337.2). Closely related is Proclus' second point that form is not in all respects like the unchangeable, because it exists in a substrate (Dam.II.42.2). Presumably, then, Proclus' strategy would have been to show that the case of matter and form does not present a relevant counter-example to the affinity argument. Soul is in all respects more like the indissoluble than the body; matter and form both share some similarities with the indissoluble, but not others, and therefore do not present a threat to the argument.

Damascius, after giving Proclus' attempt to tackle the difficulty, bluntly asserts that 'the problem remains' (Dam.II.42.3). His alternative solution is to deny altogether that matter is more permanent than form, thereby cutting away at the root of the problem rather than following Proclus' strategy. Thus, Damascius claims that 'form exists more when it is separated from matter, than does matter when it is not mastered by form', since form, unlike matter, is characterized by intelligence, and so has a greater degree of reality (Dam.I.337.3–4). The same point, in different language, is made at Dam.II.42: 'it is therefore better to think that matter does not remain, for it is lower than what remains. For remaining belongs to form and is form'.

The third and last objection—or rather series of objections—relies on a reasoning very similar to that of the second problem, but uses different examples, namely Nature and the life of particular natures in a substrate. Since Nature, in so far as it holds together and shapes bodies, fulfils one of the criteria for likeness to the indissoluble, that of mastery, it should also be indissoluble (Ol.13.6.12–15). Proclus' response points out that Nature depends on a substrate, and is hence dissimilar to the indissoluble in that respect. In the case of life inherent in particular natures, which is more like the intelligible than the body but less permanent, Proclus takes a similar line of defence: life in a substrate is not separable, does not have mastery over the substrate, and furthermore does not possess knowledge (Dam.I.338.2)

From the dense reports of the second and third objections to the affinity argument, a common difficulty emerges: when Socrates gives three criteria of likeness, invisibility, knowledge and mastery, does he mean to say that a given thing (soul, form, nature, or life) needs to possess all three in order to be more like the intelligible 'in all respects', or is it enough to possess only one property, say invisibility, in order to be more like the intelligible, and so more indissoluble, than the body? What degree of similarity, in other words, counts for the purposes of the argument? Proclus seems to think that only soul fulfils all three criteria, whereas immanent properties such as form, nature or life fall short of being like the intelligible in two respects, mastery and knowledge. Damascius has a tendency to look for more sweeping answers to problems; his alternative, global strategy is expressed clearly at Dam.II.43, here with reference to the 'particular life'. In essence, it consists in admitting that nature, form and the like are more permanent than bodies in so far as they hold them together. But even if they are similar to the intelligible in some respects, they are dissimilar from it in a fundamental way which Proclus does not

take into account. For since form, nature and life are all part of the world of generation, the kind of permanency they possess cannot be that of the intelligibles, and they are thus inseparable from their substrates.

7. *Two Platonic Problems*

Let us draw some preliminary conclusions. Proclus and Damascius are in substantial agreement about the logical structure and force of the argument. They construct it as a series of three syllogisms which by way of an *a fortiori* argument establish the modest conclusion that soul survives the body for some time. Iamblichus' ingenious attempt to draw out a dilemma from the assumptions underlying Socrates' words is rejected both on textual and on conceptual grounds by Proclus. Although Proclus and Damascius both agree on the modest import of the argument, they proffer different additional reasons for refusing to accept it as a full proof of immortality. Thus, Proclus points out that the perishability or otherwise of a second substrate, the pneumatic envelope, is not touched upon by the argument, while Damascius detects an important loophole in Cebes' objection that soul may gradually wear itself out when it has become separated from the body. In dealing with specific objections, it is noticeable that Damascius settles for more sweeping solutions, while Proclus' answers have an air of superficiality to them.[16]

So far, then, our commentators deal with real philosophical difficulties and hard interpretative choices that we can easily appreciate. This is not to deny, however, that some of the detailed worries that we find in Olympiodorus and Damascius are significantly more peculiar to the Neoplatonic commentary tradition, though not without interest. Two examples will illustrate my point.

The first problem, attributed specifically to Proclus, is about what kind of forms the soul is like (Ol.13.5; Dam.I.346; II.35). As we have seen already in the discussion of the recollection argument, the Neoplatonic universe distinguishes different levels of forms.[17] The two kinds of forms Socrates could be talking about in the affinity argument are, according to Proclus, intellective forms (τὰ νοερὰ εἴδη) in the Demiurge, and forms in the soul (Ol.13.5.1–2). The use of terms like 'the equal itself' and

[16] A fact of which Damascius is well aware; cf. Dam.II.56.7 in the case of Proclus' attempts to solve problems with the harmony theory.

[17] Cf. especially Dam.I.274; Dam.II.15.

'the beautiful itself' suggests that intellective forms are meant (ll. 3–5). Moreover, the soul is not *like* the forms it contains within itself, but identical with them (ll. 5–7). On the other hand, when Socrates refers us back to the recollection argument at 78d1–2, he mentions the forms as the items that have been discussed 'over and over'. But only forms in the soul are accessible to discursive reasoning and discussion; hence transcendent forms cannot be the subject of the previous and present discussion (ll. 7–10). Proclus' solution to the puzzle is elegant, and adopted without criticism by Damascius (cf. Dam.I.330; II.35): in so far as transcendent, intellective forms are the paradigms of forms in the soul, and paradigm and image are correlatives that cannot be known apart from each other, the discussion is about both (Ol.13.5.11–14).

This is not the place to decide whether the distinction between transcendent forms 'known by intellectual intuitions' (Ol.13.5.10: ἐκεῖνα γὰρ νοεραῖς ἐπιβολαῖς γινώσκεται) and forms in the soul is genuinely Platonic or not. But if one accepts Plato's *Seventh Letter* as genuine, as the Neoplatonists do, the problem how likeness to ineffable forms can be argued for discursively in a Platonic dialogue is a live one.[18] Damascius' answer, that the discussion, though primarily about knowing the forms in the soul, still manages to 'somehow touch upon'[19] the transcendent forms if it succeeds is intriguing, but hardly sufficient to alleviate an epistemologically precarious situation.

The second substantial problem that I wish to consider concerns a possible implication of Socrates' claim at *Phd.* 78c1–2 that 'what has been compounded and is composite' is naturally prone to suffer dissolution.[20] In so far as the universe is compounded, is it also liable to be dissolved? In this form, the problem occurs only in Damascius, who uses the opportunity to show off one of his more spectacular innovations in the lost *Timaeus Commentary*. The first, traditional answer that we find at Dam.II.36 is the one attributed to 'most of the ancients', in particular

[18] Cf. *Letters* VII.342aff. References to the passage are numerous in Proclus and Damascius. Commenting on *Parm.* 142a, Proclus remarks that 'it is stated clearly in the *Letters* that no name can with certainty comprehend an intelligible object, nor can a visible picture, nor a definition, nor any rational knowledge of it' (*In Parm.* 60K, tr. Dillon/Morrow). See also *In Parm.* 924.28ff.; 985.15–19. For Damascius, cf. *De Princ.* 1.8.9 Ruelle/1.10.4 Westerink-Combès (note *ad loc.* p. 138).

[19] Cf. Dam.I.330.7: ἐφαπτόμενος [*sc.* ὁ λόγος] γάρ πως καὶ ἐκείνων, εἴπερ κατορθοῖ ('for the discussion somehow touches upon these [*sc.* intelligible forms] too, since it succeeds.').

[20] See also Aristotle *De cael.* 1.10.279b24–31 for this problem.

literal-minded interpreters of the *Timaeus* such as Severus, Atticus and Plutarch, as we know from other sources.[21] According to their view, the universe is dissoluble in itself, but indissoluble by the will of God, who alone can untie what he has bound together, but will not do so.

The objections to this traditionalist *Timaeus* interpretation at lines 4–8 derive from Proclus, and are the product of a long history of inner-circle Platonist polemics, substantial traces of which we can find in Proclus' own *Timaeus Commentary*. How, asks Proclus, if God did not make the universe indissoluble 'from the beginning', could he do so afterwards, even if he wanted to? And why, moreover, should God's own will 'overturn' (ἀνατρέπει) what he has made, by making what is dissoluble by nature indissoluble by his will? Therefore, the universe is indissoluble from the beginning, held together by the will of God as a further bond. It is dissoluble only in the sense in which it is dependent for its infinite existence on God, 'in so far as he sends forth an infinite potency and knows the ways in which his bonds can be untied'. Since the universe is a finite body, it can only receive God's infinite potency in finite parts; hence, as Proclus puts it at *In Tim*. I.295.7–8, the universe *becomes* infinite in potency, but it *is* not.

It is here that Damascius introduces a revolutionary principle: the universe does not need Proclus' adventitious potency, because a finite body can possess infinite potency (Dam.II.36.9–14). Damascius thus contradicts a well-worn Aristotelian principle (*Phys*. VIII.10.266a24–26), that a finite body has only *finite* power.[22] Yet the reasons behind

[21] Cf. Proclus *In Tim*. III.212.6ff.

[22] See Steel (1987) for a history of this principle from Proclus to Aquinas. Cf. also Proclus *ET* 96 and Dodds (1963), 250 for additional comments. The wider philosophical context for the argument that the universe *qua* finite body cannot have an infinite power of motion has been well brought out by Sorabji (1990), who discusses the views of Proclus, Ammonius and Philoponus (esp. 184–187). Philoponus, in a lost work *de contingentia mundi*, of which Pines (1972) translates an Arabic summary, challenges Proclus' view that the universe is not naturally eternal but preserved by an outside power: 'for it is a characteristic of a thing which is eternal *a parte ante* by nature that the force which ensures the preservation of its essence should be a force natural to it and not drawn by it from something else' (324). But, pursues Philoponus, this (infinite) force can never come to be in a finite body; thus the world is always dependent on an outside cause. Therefore it is not naturally eternal, and so it is by nature created in time. Damascius' new approach, which is to secure the eternity of the world by having its infinite power reside in itself rather than in an outside cause, seems to be designed to avoid precisely the difficulty Philoponus here sets out for the Eternalists. For a characteristically vigorous riposte to Philoponus' claim that Aristotle's doctrine at *Phys*. VIII.10 entails the perishability of the

this break with Aristotle (and Proclus) remain obscure, since Damascius himself refers us to his (lost) *Timaeus Commentary*, where he seems to have elaborated the principle in more detail.

The second objection Damascius levels against Proclus stems from the premise that God's knowledge must be actualized. But in that case, how can his knowledge how to untie his own bonds be ineffectual? Given that actuality is more perfect than potentiality, to say that God eternally possesses knowledge merely potentially is to attribute imperfection to him, and so to reach an absurd conclusion. Interestingly, Philoponus, Proclus' Christian opponent on the question of the eternity of the world, uses the same kind of argument against the claim that God could never destroy the universe.[23] We can therefore see here another example of Damascius' willingness to criticise an important aspect of Proclus' *Timaeus* interpretation in favour of his own theories. Damascius' preferred solution is that the heavenly bodies are dissoluble in the sense that they are 'being joined together and being loosened at the same time', just as what is called perishable and generated is 'coming to be and being destroyed at the same time' (Dam.II.36.11–13). It belongs to the nature of composites, argues Damascius, to have parts somewhere that are disintegrating, since they would otherwise be completely unified. Presumably, we are to take this second point in conjunction with Damascius' earlier claim that the universe can possess an infinite power within itself. It would then follow that the universe is a composite in the sense that parts of it are continually perishing and coming to be, but eternal in the sense that as a whole it can contain its own source of infinite existence.

world, see Simplicius *In Phys.* 1326.38–1336.34, who like Proclus argues that a finite body can possess infinite (motive) power not in the sense of having it all at once but as obtaining it in parts from a primary mover over infinite time.

[23] Cf. Philoponus *De aet. mund. contr. Pr.* 131.26–132.28.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FINAL ARGUMENT IN PLATO'S *PHAEDO*

1. *The 'Second Voyage'*

The final argument of Plato's *Phaedo* has the best claim to offering a full proof of immortality in the dialogue, if we are to base our judgment on the reaction of the dialogue's characters themselves. At 107a, Cebes is unable to find any objections to the argument, and even the more sceptical Simmias does not retain any doubts on its validity, while allowing for the possibility of human error (cf. 107a1: τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀσθένειαν ἀτιμάζων).[1] While Socrates' conclusion to the argument encourages Simmias to revisit 'the initial hypotheses' (107b5) even if they appear certain, this does not detract from the confidence Socrates places in his *logos*. If Simmias should return to examine the initial hypotheses, he will need to 'look for nothing more'. In my view, then, Socrates' final demonstration should be taken as a serious argument which, in dramatic terms, is designed conclusively to dispel Cebes' worry that soul may be dispersed at the point of death.

And here the problems begin. What is the most plausible construction of the dialogue's final argument, and is Socrates right to present it as giving compelling reasons for the view that soul is immortal and imperishable? My main interest in the following will be Damascius' interpretation of the final argument from *Phd.* 102a10–107a1. In order to assess our commentator's own construction of the argument, however, it will be necessary to go through the central stretch of text from 102a–107a. It is easily the most controversial part of the final argument, but not its beginning. Socrates approaches the question of immortality in a general way,

[1] Sedley (1995), 16f. makes the interesting suggestion that Simmias' doubts over the validity of the final argument cast him as a misologist, whose penchant for quick agreement has turned into disillusionment over arguments in general.

with an inquiry into the causes of generation and destruction (96b9–10). In the account beginning at 96a6, Socrates tells of his fascination with the *physiologia* of his day, and the eventual realization that he has no talent for this kind of enquiry. The study of causes had unsettled his earlier, simple beliefs about the world. Examples of such beliefs are, that (i) growth is the result of food and drink, adding like matter to the living being (96c7–d6); (ii) a tall man is taller than a short man by 'just one head' (d8–e1); (iii) ten is more than eight by the addition of two (e1–3); and (iv) a two-yard long object is longer than one that is one yard long because it is one yard longer (e3–4). Singled out for more detailed discussion (at 96e6 ff.) are beliefs pertaining to (iii), concerning addition and division: two objects can be the result of the addition of two separate things, or of the separation into two of a single thing. Opposite causes, addition and separation, yield the same result, i.e. two. Puzzles of this sort had provoked Socrates to abandon the method of the natural philosophers, and to adopt instead a method of his own.

Socrates recounts his excitement on hearing that Anaxagoras had put forward the notion of Intelligence as a cause of everything, but to his disappointment finds merely physicalist explanations in the philosopher's book (97b8 ff.). Failure to learn about 'the good and binding cause' either by himself or from somebody else finally leads Socrates to his 'second voyage in the quest for the cause' (99c9–d1), the method of hypothesis.[2] Detailed treatment of this important and controversial passage, however, would lead us too far away from the primary objective of this chapter, the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Phaedo*'s final argument, and I will deal with specific sections of the text only where they are necessary to understand our commentators. Suffice it to say here that Socrates resolves the difficulties he had been unable to solve with the natural philosophers' method by positing that each thing comes to be 'by participating in the particular essence of each thing in which it participates' (μετασχὸν τῆς ἰδίας οὐσίας ἑκάστου οὗ ἂν μετάσχῃ; 101c2 f.). The participated entities in this context encompass a wide range of items, such as the beautiful itself by itself, as well as largeness, smallness and magnitude. They are

[2] For Proclus, the method of hypothesis is the highest form of dialectics, which shows the dialectician reasoning with himself and dealing neither with adversaries nor pupils. According to *In Parm.* 655.12–656.2, the *Phaedo*'s method is in agreement with that of the *Parmenides*. On Proclus' theory of dialectics, see now Gritti (2008), 165–187.

explicitly introduced with the aim of demonstrating the soul's immortality from them (cf. 100b8 f.: ἐκ τούτων τὴν αἰτίαν ἐπιδείξειν καὶ ἀνευρήσειν ὡς ἀθάνατον ἡ ψυχή). Acceptance of the method of hypothesis by the interlocutors paves the way for Socrates' claim that Forms do not admit of contrary properties.

The line of thought from the beginning of Socrates' account at 96a6 to the final demonstration of immortality is thus closely connected, and there is no great difficulty in identifying the links between the different parts. The inquiry into the causes for generation and destruction provides both the genealogy and the rational justification for Socrates' own method of hypothesis, from which the principle of the exclusion of opposites is deduced, which in turn is modified in the course of the demonstration of immortality. It comes as a slight surprise, then, to find in Damascius a range of diverse answers to the question why an account of the causes of generation and perishing is necessary before turning to immortality (Dam.I.407).

The first attempt to explain the connection is that, since the soul is the subject of the investigation and itself the principle of generation and perishing, Socrates attempts 'to hunt down' (θηρεύειν) soul starting from these. The answer in effect presupposes a distinction between the causes and the contributory causes (τὰ συναίτια) of generation and perishing, with soul (as principle of change) belonging to the causes proper (cf. Dam.I.409.1–2; II.66.3). Under 'contributory causes' (cf. *Tim*. 46c–d), Damascius has in mind the material causes that underlie explanations of the kind given by the natural philosophers, examples of which are given at *Phd*. 96b2–8.[3] Socrates' introduction to the 'subtler answer' at *Phd*. 105b–c had in fact classed soul with the kind of causes that essentially bring about certain opposites, like fire the hot. On this first line of interpretation, Socrates would begin with a general investigation of generation and perishing in order to reveal soul's nature as a principle of change rather than something that merely participates in opposites brought about by other principles.

A second answer considers that, if (per hypothesis) the soul is subject to perishing, it will also have come to be. In that case, however, it will be

[3] For the distinction between causes and contributory causes, cf. Proclus *In Parm*. 1059.14–19: the last two hypotheses of the *Parmenides* deal with immanent form and matter, 'which are truly "other" and belong to others rather than themselves (ἄλλα ἐστὶν ὄντως καὶ ἄλλων, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἑαυτῶν), and are contributory causes rather than causes according to the distinction made in the *Phaedo*' (tr. Morrow/Dillon).

necessary to first define the causes or contributory causes of generation and perishing themselves. Only after a full analysis of what, in a causal sense, is involved in the processes of generation and perishing can it be decided whether the soul is subject to them.

Damascius' preferred answer, introduced at Dam.I.407.5 ff., reasonably takes into account the central role played by the principle of the exclusion of opposites.[4] Soul, being form, has a certain effect on things, and is not receptive of the opposite of that effect which it bestows. This approach takes its cue from *Phd*. 105d10 ff., where Socrates argues that soul, as the bringer of life, cannot itself receive the opposite of life, death.

Socrates' account of how he was struck, and finally disappointed, by Anaxagoras' book, gives rise to some highly metaphysical comments in Dam.I.412–415, which attempt to explain the relation between Intellect and the Good. From the *Phaedo* text, it is clear that Socrates sees a close connection between *nous* and what is best, but their relation is not further explored.[5] Damascius begins by pointing out that Intellect is opposed to the irrational and indefinite material causes which Anaxagoras put forward, and is a 'measure and simply a standard' (ὅρος καὶ ἀτεχνῶς κανών; Dam.I.412.4). Two faculties lead Intellect towards the Good, its judgment (κρίσις) which defines the Good as its goal, and its desire (ὄρεξις) which rouses it towards making the Good its own (l. 5).[6] The reason why Socrates cannot think of Intellect other than in relation to what is best lies in the intimate connection between the two metaphysical levels, since Intellect is the first product of the Good, and the first to revert back to it. The close connection between the two is summed up in the idea that Intellect has the 'eye of love of the Good' (ὄμμα ἐρωτικὸν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ; Dam.I.413.3), i.e. a trace of, and a desire for, the Good.[7]

Damascius' further comments are intended to clarify a number of issues that arise from Plato's text. In what sense is Socrates' 'second

[4] Typically introduced with 'but what is closer at hand' (ἢ τὸ προσεχέστερον), probably introducing a subtle refinement of Proclus, who may have put forward the previous two answers (Dam.I.407.1–5).

[5] Cf. 97c4–6: τόν γε νοῦν κοσμοῦντα πάντα κοσμεῖν καὶ ἕκαστον τιθέναι ταύτῃ ὅπῃ ἂν βέλτιστα ἔχῃ.

[6] There is nothing surprising in attributing 'desire' to Intelligence; the idea is fully present already in Plotinus, who needs it to explain how *nous* reverts back to the Good. The process and meaning of this reversion has recently been well explored by Emilsson (2007), esp. 70–75. Cf. Plotinus *Enn*. III.8.11.22–24.

[7] See also the note by Westerink (1977), 222, who cites *Enn*. V.1.7.5–6 as a Plotinian parallel.

voyage' a mere second-best? And what is the relation between the kind of explanations Socrates had been longing to find in Anaxagoras' book and the 'second voyage' that consists in the method of hypothesis? The answer to the first question explains that Socrates has abandoned the search for the final cause and efficient causes, and instead turned to universal forms (τὰ καθόλου εἴδη; Dam.I.415.4) in the rational soul as a second-best method of enquiry. Universal or paradigmatic forms are easier and simpler to assume and to posit than both the final and the efficient cause. On the one hand, the final cause, the Good, is truly ineffable and rises above sensible images. It appears less clearly in the world of generation because of the latter's 'connatural indefiniteness' (cf. Dam.I.416.6: διὰ τὴν αὐτῆς ἀοριστίαν σύμφυτον), on account of which *genesis* is infected with evil, which in turn is ultimately caused by matter.[8] On the other hand, the efficient cause, Intellect, is difficult to grasp because of its connection with the Good, and secondly, because the change which sensible images in the world of generation undergo 'belies' (ἀναίνεται) the nature of Intellect as unchanging efficient cause, which is why Aristotle too attributes all efficient causality to celestial beings.[9] Finally, Intellect is less apparent than the exemplary Forms because the particular sensible causes are 'almost self-sufficient for the purposes of generation' (σχεδὸν ἀρκοῦντα πρὸς τὴν γένεσιν; Dam.I.416.11–12), since every particular form seems to be able to produce what is like itself.

To the question how the Good, which Anaxagoras had not been able to fully include into his natural philosophy, and Socrates' own method are related, we find another firmly metaphysical answer in Damascius: the reason why Socrates gives the beautiful as an example of his own method is because it contains in itself a reflection of the final cause, the Good (at Dam.I.417). What is beneficial in this world (τὸ ὠφέλιμον ἐνθάδε) participates in the form of the Good; but Socrates in the *Gorgias* (474d–475a) had laid down that the beautiful includes the useful

[8] On ἀοριστία as the defining characteristic of matter, see already Plotinus, e.g. *Enn.* II.4.11.37.

[9] See Westerink (1977), 224 n. *ad loc.* The thought seems to be that Aristotle restricted efficient causality to the celestial bodies (the rotation of which is the movement most akin to eternity and Intelligence), in order to limit any association of Intelligence with change. Since forms in our world are caught up with constant change, they 'disown' or 'belie' the true nature of Intelligence which is unchanging, and of which they are only a weak reflection.

(τὸ χρήσιμον). It is through the intermediary of the useful or the beneficial (the two terms are regarded as equivalent in the scholion by Damascius) that the beautiful participates in the form of the Good, which must itself be related to the transcendent Good, the final cause. With this demonstration, our commentator shows that Socrates has not picked his example by chance, but hints at the deeper link between his own method and the knowledge of the Good he had earlier failed to find in Anaxagoras.

2. *The Final Argument*

To sum up the movement of Socrates' argument down to 102b, the search for the causes of generation and perishing leads to the method of hypothesis, which introduces explanations of the form 'the large is large in virtue of its participation in largeness'. One consequence of this type of explanation is drawn out at 102b–103a: largeness itself will never be large and small at the same time, nor will the large in us admit the small. Neither the forms by themselves nor the forms instantiated in particulars can receive the opposite of what they are. The next step in Socrates' argument introduces a 'subtler' method of explaining properties than the previous one. Some things which do not have opposites in themselves bring along with them a property which does have a proper opposite. Thus, fire as long as it exists will always bring about the hot, and never admits of the cold. When the cold approaches, fire will either withdraw or perish. From the emphatic way in which Socrates presents the relation between entities (such as fire) and certain properties these entities bring with them (such as the hot), it seems that some form of essential predication is what is intended here. If a thing x admitted of the opposite of some property F it always brings about, it would no longer be x.

The subtler method of explanation so carefully outlined by Socrates leads to the heart of the immortality argument, a *Blitz* series of argumentative moves from 105d–107b. In analogy with fire which always brings about the hot when it is present in bodies, soul always brings about life. Just as fire does not admit of the cold and is therefore 'uncoolable', so soul does not admit of the opposite of what it confers, death, and is therefore 'deathless'. Fire, as long as it exists, is 'uncoolable'; but it may still cease to exist altogether, for whatever reason. Does the same apply to the case of soul? Is it, in other words, enough to demonstrate that soul is

incapable of receiving death while remaining soul, in order to infer that it will always exist? The relevant section of the text (105e10–106d7) attempts to give something of an argument to justify the inference from deathless to imperishable, but what it amounts to is not easy to divine. Initially, Socrates gives a number of examples to establish the point that what is uncoolable (i.e. what is hot, or the heat in a hot thing), for instance, will retreat when cold 'attacks' fire. If we were to suppose that the hot is imperishable, it would not perish with the fire being cooled, but instead depart and remain intact.

At this point of the discussion, Socrates considers a difficulty that an imaginary objector might bring up: granted that it is impossible for the odd to become even, still we cannot rule out the possibility that the odd may perish when the even 'attacks' and takes over its place. In the case of the soul, when death approaches, the soul may not admit it, but all the same come to perish. Yet although Socrates is clearly able to pinpoint the central problem, namely that another argument is needed to establish the conclusion that the deathless is imperishable, what follows is hardly an argument at all. Cebes feels no need for further discussion, because 'hardly anything would be unable to receive destruction, if what is deathless, being everlasting (ἀίδιον ὄν), would be able to perish' (106d2–3). Some role must be given to the term ἀίδιον, which at first sight acts as a medium term between 'deathless' and 'imperishable'. But the reader is left guessing why the deathless must also be 'everlasting': surely this is just another, if more precise, way of putting the question whether being 'deathless' can yield 'imperishable', rather than its solution. The elliptical participle construction ἀίδιον ὄν, in other words, seems merely to assume what needs to be proven, namely that soul is not only deathless but also 'everlasting'. Socrates' response at 106d5–7, that it is agreed by all men that God, the form of life itself and anything else that is immortal, never perish, suggests precisely that it is now taken as a matter of common agreement that soul belongs to things that are 'deathless' not in the special sense of being 'unable to receive death', but in its traditional acceptation of being 'everlasting'. Since 'deathless' in its traditional sense implies everlasting existence, deathless things, including individual souls, are also imperishable (cf. 106e1–2).

At 106d2–3, therefore, it appears as though a crucial change in the meaning of 'deathless' occurs, as implying everlasting existence rather than incapacity to receive death. Does Socrates revert to the traditional idea of immortality for good philosophical reasons, or is he resting his

case with an appeal to popular religious notions?[10] A possible criticism one may wish to bring up against tying the idea of everlastingness to the 'deathless' is that it introduces an ambiguity: Socrates' argument so far relies on the restricted sense of deathless as 'unable to receive death', in parallel with 'uneven' and other privative terms. If he is really following through with the logic of the argument so far, it should be deathlessness in the limited sense of 'unable to receive death' that is relevant to the issue of soul's being imperishable, not the notion of deathlessness that implies 'being everlasting'. If, on the other hand, an appeal to a commonly held view about God, the form of life and other immortal things were all that was needed to clinch the case for the soul's immortality, how can one avoid a sense that the preceding discussion about essential and accidental predication has, in the last instance, no bearing on the question of soul's survival after death?

There are a number of attempts by modern scholars to overcome this sense of disappointment, which mainly rely on drawing out implicit assumptions from the argument itself or the preceding discussion in the dialogue.[11] Rather than weighing up these proposals directly, however, I shall turn to the debate between Damascius and the Peripatetic Strato. This will be a convenient way of investigating the weaknesses of the final

[10] See Bostock (1982), 192. Sedley (2009), 148–149 argues that the demonstration of immortality is already accomplished at *Phd*. 105e10, so that Socrates' apparent bow to popular notions of immortality at 106d would have little relevance to the question of soul's imperishability. Proclus 'rescues' the final argument by interpreting 'god and the form of life and anything else that is immortal' in a theological manner: Plato thus demonstrates that the first source of inextinguishable life and eternity exists in the Intelligibles. Cf. *TP* III.55.26–56.6: Τὸ γὰρ ἀθάνατον ἐν ζωῇ καὶ μετὰ ζωῆς ὑφέστηκε· διὸ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῷ Φαίδωνι Σωκράτης πού φησι μετὰ τὰς καλὰς καὶ πολλὰς τῆς ψυχικῆς ἀθανασίας ἀποδείξεις· Ὁ δὲ δὴ θεός, ὦ φίλε Κέβης, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς εἶδος πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἀθάνατά ἐστιν. Ἡ τοίνυν ζωὴ ἡ νοητὴ καὶ ὁ θεὸς ὁ τῆς ζωῆς ταύτης συνεκτικὸς πρώτως ἕξει τὸ ἀθάνατον καὶ ἔστι πηγὴ τῆς ὅλης ἀιδιότητος· τοῦτο δέ ἐστιν ὁ αἰών ('For what is immortal exists in life and with life; this is why Socrates in the *Phaedo* says somewhere after the many fine proofs of the soul's immortality "But surely god, dear Cebes, and the form of life itself are much more immortal". Intelligible life, then, and the god who holds together this life have immortality in the primary sense and are the font of all everlastingness; and this is eternity').

[11] Thus, O'Brien (2007) makes much of the definition of death as the separation of soul and body accepted previously by the interlocutors (already at 67d4–5), which, according to his interpretation, also underlies the final argument, especially 106d2–3. All that is needed to prove that soul is imperishable is that it survives the moment when it separates from the body, since it never admits death. Gallop's solution is to connect God and the form of life with the subtle and safe causes at the beginning of the argument (1975, 220–221).

argument in more detail, as well as possible responses to them and their relative merits. There are two questions, then, that will be my concern in the following. Firstly, what are the main lines of the debate between Strato and Damascius, and how important were Strato's criticisms in shaping Damascius' construction of the argument? Secondly, to what extent does Damascius still leave room for doubt about the soul's immortality? My answer to the last question is that Damascius discovers a weakness in the argument which he nowhere resolves. As in his other celebrated writings which probe and clarify Neoplatonic concepts through a process of internal critique, the final result of Damascius' analysis is one of *aporia*.[12] In effect, he suggests that even the final argument of the *Phaedo* is open to the worry that soul may disperse after separating from the body. How could soul, having a limited potency, not perish by itself? I will maintain that nothing in the commentary answers this problem; to substantiate my claim, I will discuss the peculiar appendix that runs through a number of different immortality arguments loosely related to the *Phaedo* (Dam.I.458–465) in more detail than has so far been done.

Before turning to Strato's criticisms and their significance in the commentaries, however, a few words on our only sources Dam.I and II are in order. They differ in level of detail and the scope of the material they contain. The second lecture course (Dam.II) is significantly more condensed on a number of points, and presents a tighter discussion of Strato's objections and their refutations (Dam.I.431–448, compared with a single scholion at Dam.II.78). Between them, however, the two courses are clearly consistent, discuss the same points where we can compare them, and arrive by and large at the same conclusions, as I will show in more detail. All the same, it must be said at the outset that the source question with the final argument is somewhat more problematic than with previous arguments in the *Phaedo*. Although there is no doubt that Damascius' point of departure will to a significant extent be the lost commentary of Proclus, we cannot use Olympiodorus for comparison, since his lectures break off well before the last argument. The upshot is that (i) we can say comparatively little about how Proclus would have understood the argument; and (ii) Proclus' influence in this section of the commentaries becomes very hard to gauge.[13]

[12] An important study on the aporetic nature of Damascius' theology is Combès (1996), 199–223.

[13] A small step towards redeeming this situation can be taken by considering (i)

3. *Strato's Criticisms and Their Impact*

We do not know who first discussed Strato's criticisms or incorporated them into a commentary on the *Phaedo*, but there is a strong likelihood that they would have undergone a series of significant revisions.[14] As a result, we cannot reconstruct the plan of Strato's attack on any solid grounds; Damascius' own grouping of the individual criticisms in Dam.I is all we have to go on.[15] As an introduction to Strato's attack, I will begin with his two main points at Dam.II.78.1–7:

(i) Nothing can receive its opposite and remain what it is. In that sense life is 'deathless' and cold 'heatless', but both can be destroyed all the same.

Priscian's report of Proclus' analysis of the argument, *sol. ad Ch.* 47.2–24, taken from the latter's monograph on the immortality arguments in Plato, and (ii) the more complex immortality argument that runs through a series of propositions in the *Elements of Theology*. (i) Priscian does not yield much interesting material for Proclus, however; its main point of interest is an innovation by Iamblichus, who makes use of a principle designed to strengthen the argument (likely to be Iamblichean, by Ol.10.7, perhaps extrapolated from Plotinus, *Enn.* V.4.2.28–34). It holds that what causes a property P in something else cannot receive that P back into itself. Fire, for instance, gives heat, but cannot receive back the heat it has given. Thus, if soul as the giver of life is insusceptible of the life it gives, so much more will it be insusceptible of the death that is opposed to the life it gives. The point seems to be inferred from the principle that a cause is greater than its effect. If the cause does not need its effect because it possesses a power greater than the effect which it confers, it also cannot receive its effect back into itself. On the underlying principle of causality, see Lloyd (1976). (ii) Proclus, on the other hand, is not primarily concerned with interpreting the *Phaedo*, and presents a largely original defence of immortality. Briefly, he attempts to anchor the soul's life-giving activity in the processes of self-reversion and self-knowledge, arguing that 'cognition is itself a kind of life' (*ET* 188.12–13). I append a more detailed discussion of this argument at the end of the chapter.

[14] There is a possibility that Strato's criticisms may also have been translated into Neoplatonic terminology. One example for this process is the occurrence of ἐπιφέρουσα ζωὴ at Dam.I.441.2. Gottschalk (1965), 167, notes that 'the nonsensical term … comes from Olympiodorus [*sc. nunc* Damascius] or another Neoplatonist.' Certainly, the exact term does not occur before Damascius and seems much like a Neoplatonic coinage (though naturally inspired by *Phd.* 104e10), introduced in the process of condensing and reformulating Strato's original criticisms.

[15] Wehrli (1969), 77 charges Olympiodorus (= *nunc* Damascius) with arranging Strato's criticisms in a confused manner and distorting their underlying sequence of thought. His order runs as follows: (a) Dam.I.431 (the living being); (b) Dam.I.434 (irrational souls); (c) Dam.I.435 (plants); (d) Dam.I.437 (all of genesis); (e) Dam.I.436 (particular natures); (f) Dam.I.432 (compounds); (g) Dam.I.433 (many senses of negation); (h) Dam.I.438 (example of a stone); (i–m) all in Norvin's and Westerink's order (MSS), viz. Dam.I.439–442.

(ii) A living thing perishes not by receiving an opposite quality, death, but by simple loss of life.

The two challenges are related in so far as they make use of one fundamental idea, namely that Socrates' definition of death is insufficient for the purposes of his argument. According to Strato, life cannot remain what it is and receive death, and in this limited sense, life in a substratum and any living thing whatsoever will be 'deathless'. Argument (i) attempts to show the insufficiency of the Socratic position for showing that soul is imperishable: the limited sense of 'deathless' as incapable of receiving death is perfectly compatible with being perishable; otherwise, no living being would perish, which is absurd. The second challenge (ii) offers an alternative definition of perishing, not as the receiving of death, but as simple loss of life.

Strato's challenge is elaborated in greater detail in Dam.I, where two strings of objections (431–433 and 434–437) bring home the point that the final argument, if valid, would prove far too much. Strato's own solution to the problems he raises, that perishing must be defined as loss of life, not as the receiving of death, has not been included in the list of problems in Dam.I. The first string of three objections introduces the difficulty that every living being is insusceptible of its opposite (death), as long as it is alive. Similarly, every compound will be insusceptible of dissolution as long as it exists as a compound (Dam.I.442). But by Socrates' reasoning all living beings would (absurdly) also have to be immortal in virtue of being insusceptible of death (and every compound indissoluble in virtue of being insusceptible of dissolution). The same point is taken up again with the observation that the term 'deathless' is ambiguous between 'being insusceptible of death' and 'having inextinguishable life' (ζωὴ ἄσβεστος; Dam.I.433.1–2). Only the former sense applies to the argument, namely that soul is susceptible of only one of two opposites (life) and exists along with it, or does not exist at all.[16]

The second string of four objections pursues much the same strategy of showing that the final argument would prove too much if valid. Irrational souls (Dam.I.434), plants (Dam.I.435) and each individual nature (Dam.I.436) all bestow some quality such as life or, in the case of

[16] O'Brien (2007), 137 f. rightly restricts the scope of μετὰ τούτου at Dam.I.433.3 to οὖσα alone, and puts a comma before ἢ μὴ οὖσα, ('and soul exists with this [*sc.* life], or does not exist'). Westerink has μετὰ τούτου cover both οὖσα and ἢ μὴ οὖσα, which somewhat obscures Strato's train of thought.

individual natures, simply 'what is according to nature' (τὸ κατὰ φύσιν) on their substrates. Yet at the same time, they cannot receive the opposite of what they bestow on their substrates as long as they exist. According to the objection, then, even the humblest of natural beings are immune from death or 'what is contrary to nature', and could be seen as imperishable (Dam.I.434–436) on the Platonist's line of reasoning.

Speaking even more generally, Strato objects at Dam.I.437 that the whole world of generation (πᾶσα γένεσις) is imperishable, in the sense that it is incapable of receiving its own proper opposite. Nothing that is coming to be (τι γιγνόμενον) can have received its own proper opposite, which is 'having perished' (ἐφθαρμένον). When it perishes, it ceases to be what it is; but while it continues to come to be, it cannot be said to have completed a process of perishing, as a matter of logical necessity.[17] Unlike the case of irrational souls, plants and individual natures, however, the world of generation here is not said to confer any property the opposite of which it cannot receive. Rather, the thought seems to be closer to e.g. Dam.I.432, that a compound, as long as it exists as a compound, cannot have been dissolved (διαλυθὲν).

The third series of objections by Strato opens with the general point that the inference from 'deathless' (in the sense of being incapable of receiving death) to 'imperishable' is 'rashly' made (cf. Dam.I.438.1: προχείρως εἴληπται). The example given is that of a stone, which is incapable of receiving death, and in this way deathless but not imperishable.[18] Strato here capitalizes on two different senses which the term 'deathless' can take: on the one hand, the sense in which Socrates uses it, to describe something's being unable to receive its opposite, and on the other hand, the sense in which something is unable to receive either one of two opposite terms, such as life and death in the case of the stone.[19] There might seem to be more than a whiff of sophistry to Strato's example of a stone, for evidently, the examples of soul and stone are not parallel. As Damascius points out, soul is generally admitted to bring about life (and hence presumably to possess it in some sense), whereas a stone does not admit of either life or death, and does not bring about either.

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[17] Cf. the force of ἔσται in Dam.I.437.2: οὐ γὰρ ἔσται τι γιγνόμενον ἐφθαρμένον.

[18] See also O'Brien (2007), 215–221 for Strato's stone objection.

[19] Contrary to Gottschalk, this objection cannot be a true generalization of the previous ones, because the point made is an entirely new one, concerning a particular sense of negation rather than examples of opposite qualities. Cf. Gottschalk (1965), 166.

For the purposes of his argument, however, Strato is right to demand from the Platonist an explanation of what exactly it is that makes soul different from cases where the inference from 'not capable of admitting death' to 'being imperishable' leads to absurdity. Damascius' reply, that it is admitted that soul generally brings about life, of course goes back to the text of the *Phaedo* itself (*Phd.* 105d3–4). But Strato does not have to give in here. At Dam.I.439, he raises the possibility that soul does not confer life, 'but sometimes *is* the life that is conferred'. He does not give us examples, but his point is a good one. Neoplatonists such as Proclus, for example, would certainly maintain that the souls of irrational animals do not possess a life that is separable from their substrate, and are thus in some sense identical with the life they confer on bodies.[20] The next scholion (Dam.I.440) develops the thought that the soul may possess its own life as something conferred from the outside. Perhaps the soul is alive and has life only adventitiously (ἐπείσακτον). It must then derive its life from some other source and may thus in principle be liable to lose it.

Strato's fourth point (Dam.I.441) picks up a worry that Cebes had expressed in the dialogue with his weaver analogy: even if the soul cannot receive the death that is the opposite of the life that soul confers on the living body, it might still perish by another kind of death that is opposed to life-giving life, not the conferred life of the substratum. Strato's final objection at Dam.I.442 does not add anything of substance, but uses the example of fire, which cannot become cold and remain fire, to draw the analogy with soul, which may only be free from death as long as it exists (ἔστ' ἂν ᾖ).

4. *Refuting Strato*

Having outlined Strato's objections, it remains to consider how Damascius attempts to refute them, and, secondly, to see what impact they had on Damascius' own version of the final argument. Although we will see that Damascius has no difficulty brushing aside Strato's objections, it should be remembered that our commentator stands at the end of a long debate over the precise relation between soul and life. For some

[20] Cf. Ol.10.5.4–6; Dam.I.177.5. See, however, Opsomer (2006) for an in-depth discussion of Proclus' view that some higher faculties of irrational souls are separable.

Platonists at least, Strato's insistence that life is only accidentally predicated of soul may well have posed a threat, in the sense that the relation between soul and life is by no means obvious in Neoplatonic writings. Are the two identical, or are they different, and if they are different, how can one avoid the conclusion that soul is not essentially alive? At *Enn*. VI.2.6.6–13, for instance, Plotinus raises the question whether soul's essence and life are one in the sense of being one *logos*, but rejects the idea. While soul is one in the sense of being one 'underlying reality' (ὑποκείμενον), it is also divided into 'two or more, as many things as soul is primarily'.[21] Soul, in other words, is a unity of some sort, but also internally more divided than a single, simple reason-principle, and therefore not simply identical with life. At the same time, however, one cannot say that soul *has* life without avoiding the conclusion that the essence of soul and its life are somehow distinct, i.e. that soul's essence is not 'in life' by itself, and its life not 'in its essence'.[22] My point, then, is that the operative idea of the final argument, soul as life-giving force, was not something that could be taken as true by Neoplatonists such as Plotinus without further analysis and probing.[23] By the time of Proclus and Damascius, something of a consensus on the right way to formulate the relation seems to have emerged: soul both *is* alive and *has* life from itself.[24] How this formula plays out in the actual analysis of the argument we will see in due course.

In reply to the first group of objections outlined by Strato in Dam.I.444, our commentator points out that Socrates' argument only applies to entities that bring about either one of a pair of opposites, unlike irrational

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[21] Chiaradonna (2002), 346 remarks that 'Plotino intende qui parlare dell'Anima non come ipostasi unitaria ma come sintesi delle forme a un determinato livello (ad un più alto livello lo è il Nous)'.

[22] Plotinus *Enn*. VI.2.6.11–13: Ἡ οὖν οὐσία καὶ ζωή, ἢ ἔχει ζωήν. Ἀλλ' εἰ ἔχει, τὸ ἔχον καθ' αὑτὸ οὐκ ἐν ζωῇ, ἥ τε ζωὴ οὐκ ἐν οὐσίᾳ· ἀλλ' εἰ μὴ ἔχει θάτερον τὸ ἕτερον, λεκτέον ἓν ἄμφω ('It [*sc*. the being of soul] is therefore substance and life, or it has life. But if it has life, that which has is, in itself, not in life, and the life not in substance; but if one does not have the other, one must say that both are one'; tr. Armstrong).

[23] P. Hadot (1968), 352–375 has shown to great effect how the question of soul's relation to life could invite highly complex analyses in Neoplatonic or Neoplatonizing philosophical texts.

[24] This definition can be found already in Porphyry *Sent*. 17: ἡ ψυχὴ οὐσία ἀμεγέθης, ἄυλος, ἄφθαρτος, ἐν ζωῇ παῤ ἑαυτῆς ἐχούσῃ τὸ ζῆν κεκτημένη τὸ εἶναι ('the soul is a substance without magnitude, immaterial and indestructible, which has obtained its being in a form of life that has living from itself'). Cf. Goulet-Cazé's useful comments in Brisson (2005), 471–479. See also Baltes (2002), Bausteine 158.1–3 and comments (255–259).

souls or compounds, which do not bring about a quality, but merely 'co-exist' with one of a pair of opposites. In the case of animals, for instance, the negation of one opposite (death) is tantamount to affirming their existence, not their immortality, since they only exist together with the other opposite term (life), but do not also bring it about.

Related to this first response is the brief discussion of Strato's second series of objections at Dam.I.445. Strato had earlier argued that if one were to follow the reasoning of Socrates in the *Phaedo*, the souls of animals and plants would be deathless too, given that as long as they exist, they cannot receive qualities opposite to the properties they bestow. As a consequence, plant-souls could be called 'deathless' just as reasonably as any other souls, including human ones. Damascius offers us two strategies to avoid this unwelcome conclusion: firstly, he denies the basic premise of his opponent's argument, that forms of life belonging to 'the lowest extremes of generation' (τὰ ἔσχατα), like animal- or plant-souls, confer life properly speaking, like the substances with which the argument is concerned. Instead, says Damascius, the lower forms of life are conferred only, presumably without themselves passing on life. How—and by what agency—are the forms of life in question conferred? Damascius does not say, but it seems probable that universal nature will be what is most immediately conferring life upon particular things in nature. Secondly, if one were to grant that irrational souls confer life in some sense, even they cannot receive the opposite of what they bestow, and do not perish together with the lives they confer upon their bodies (their ἐπιφερόμενα). There is therefore a perfectly acceptable way in which plants, irrational animals and the like can be said to be 'deathless' (but not of course thereby imperishable), without any embarrassment to the Platonist.

Strato's third set of problems, which sets out to drive a wedge between the ideas of soul and life, is repudiated with a simple reminder that soul is generally agreed to be alive and to bring about life (Dam.I.446). Hence, a stone is not deathless in the same sense as the soul; it is 'deathless' in the sense of being incapable of receiving either life or death, as opposed to soul, which is incapable of receiving death alone. Nor can soul be said to have a conferred or adventitious life, since it never appears without life. But is there a kind of death that is opposed to soul's life-giving life? According to Dam.I.447, there is only one kind of death that is opposed both to the life that soul confers *and* the life that it has itself, just as there is only one kind of cold that is opposed both to the heat brought about by fire *and* the heat that is part of the essence of fire. The point can be backed

up by the following dilemma Damascius poses for Strato (Dam.I.447.4–7): if one assumes, per hypothesis, that there is a form (εἶδος) of death uniquely opposed to the form of life that the soul has in its essence, one will need to explain where the soul's own life-giving life has come from. (A) If the soul 'brings about' (ἐπιφέρει) its own life-giving life as well as the life in other things, why make a difference at all? Both kinds of life are 'brought about' (ἐπιφερομέναι), so they should have the same form. (B) If, on the other hand, the soul's life-giving life derives from some source other than itself, there must be two kinds of life-giving life: (i) the life-giving life of the soul itself (with which it gives life to other things), and (ii) the higher-order life-giving life (which brings about the soul's own life-giving life). But in this case, both (i) and (ii) are lives that are bringing about (ἐπιφέρουσαι) life, so that, again, they should have the same form. Therefore, taking together arguments (A) and (B), there is no need to go beyond the one form of life that comprises both the soul's life-living life and the life that it bestows on bodies, and therefore no special form of death uniquely opposed to the soul's life.

Another way of arriving at the same conclusion is paved at Dam.I.448. There can be no special kind of death from which only the soul suffers because if the soul that confers life is always insusceptible of death, nothing remains that could extinguish the life that bestows life (Dam.I.448). Death destroys only the life in a substrate, but the assumption of the entire argument is that soul is a separate substance, not the life that is conferred to the substrate. A similar point is made at Dam.II.78.8–12: soul is not a condition of the substrate, but a substance that is united with the body and brings life to it as the condition of the body, just as an illuminated object does not contain light itself but only shares in it by participation.

5. *Damascius' New Analysis*

On the face of it, it looks as though Strato's objections presented few difficulties which our commentators Proclus and Damascius were unable to handle. This general impression is true, with one crucial exception. Strato was at pains to show that the soul may suffer a kind of death peculiar to itself even if it is a principle of life. At times, Damascius seems to follow closely the reasoning attributed to Proclus at Dam.II.78.13–16: if death is loss of life, as Strato maintains, and loss of life is suffered by the substratum, then soul, as a separable life-giving substance,

is immune to death, and so immortal. However, the argument does not stop here, and Dam.II.78.17–27 shows that Damascius was dissatisfied with Proclus' reply. Soul by itself after its separation from the substratum might become later extinct, even though it does not perish at the point of separating itself from the body, unlike the lower kinds of life. The worry that soul may exhaust its potency when left to itself seems to have troubled Damascius, as two passages clearly indicate. The problem concludes Damascius' report of Proclus' solution to Strato's problems, and his response to it.[25] Furthermore, there is the oddly placed Dam.I.443, inserted between Strato's objections and Damascius' answers to them. The problem is formulated in Aristotelian language in both passages (cf. Dam.I.443.1–2: τὸ πεπερασμένην εἶναι καὶ δύναμιν ἔχειν πεπερασμένην), and bears a resemblance to a difficulty Damascius had already raised about the eternity of the universe: assuming that soul is finite and has a finite potency, how can it exist by itself in perpetuity, and not exhaust itself by itself without anything destroying it from the outside?[26]

Strangely, however, the difficulty is nowhere addressed directly in the remainder of the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, and it is doubtful that we are in a position to determine what Damascius' solution would have

[25] Dam.II.78.27–28: ἀλλ' οὔπω ἡ ἀπορία λέλυται τοῦ δέος εἶναι μήποτε πεπερασμένην ἔχουσα δύναμιν καθ' αὑτὴν ἀπόλλυται. This remark comes *after* Damascius' own reply to Proclus, a fact which shows that it cannot here be a citation from Strato. Since Dam.I.443 mentions the same difficulty, it is clear that even if the objection were to derive ultimately from Strato himself, as Wehrli thinks, Damascius fully accepts it as a problem, but does not offer a solution to it. Westerink (1977), 233 n. *ad loc*., and O'Brien (2007), 137–138 n. 67, take Dam.I.443 to be Damascius playing *advocatus diaboli*, but agree that the objection does not go back to Strato.

[26] Dam.I.443: μήποτε, κἂν πάντα τὰ ἄλλα διαφύγωμεν, τὸ πεπερασμένην εἶναι καὶ δύναμιν ἔχειν πεπερασμένην οὐκ ἂν ἐλέγξαιμεν. ἔστω γὰρ καὶ ἐπιφέρουσα ζωὴν καὶ χωριστὴ κατ' οὐσίαν καὶ μὴ δεχομένη τὸν ἐναντίον τῇ ἐπιφερομένῃ ζωῇ θάνατον· καθ' ἑαυτὴν δὲ οὖσα καμεῖταί ποτε καὶ φθαρήσεται σβεσθεῖσα ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς, οὐδενὸς ἔξωθεν ἐπιόντος ('Perhaps even if we escaped all other objections we not would refute the argument that soul is finite and has a finite potency. For let soul be what bestows life and is separable in substance and not receptive of what is opposite to the life that is bestowed, i.e. death; yet when it is by itself soul will become exhausted at some point and perish having become extinct by itself, with nothing approaching it from outside'). The genitive absolute clause οὐδενὸς ἔξωθεν ἐπιόντος, while echoing Socrates' language at e.g. *Phd*. 106e4, effectively brushes aside the main point of the *Phaedo*'s concluding immortality argument, that the immortal part remains when death approaches. Damascius could thus be seen as emphasizing that the difficulty he is considering is not addressed by the final argument of the dialogue.

been.[27] One attempt to tackle the problem occurs at Dam.II.80, which discusses the possibility that soul may perish after the separation from its substrate. The response considers only two possibilities by which the soul may perish: either by the body, or by another soul. No mention is made of the possibility that soul may perish by itself, with the possible exception of the unconvincing opening argument, that soul as natural giver of life will protect itself against death wherever it may come from. The soul cannot be affected by the body, since the opposite is in fact the case—the soul affects the body—and soul is incorporeal in any case.[28] Could a soul destroy another soul? Souls *qua* species will tend to preserve each other—but could souls be destructive of each other *qua* individual characters? But then how could soul, which contains the principles of all forms, including that of the individual soul that would destroy it, perish by a part of itself? An individual soul would have perished from the beginning if it contained the principle of a destructive soul as part of its own essence.

The possibility that soul could perish by itself after separating from the body, then, is not put to rest at Dam.II.80. There is, however, another section of Damascius' commentary that promises answers to the two main questions I am hoping to pursue, to what extent Strato's criticisms helped to sharpen the analysis of the final argument, and if any room for doubt about the soul's immortality remains at the end of our commentator's discussion. The relevant stretch of text is Dam.I.449–465, which can be compared to the philosopher's earlier 'monograph' on opposites (Dam.I.207–252). The design of the 'monograph' on opposites had been to deal with a number of criticisms against the argument, which Damascius considers to have been inadequately dealt with by his predecessors. As we have seen in chapter three, an integral part of Damascius' defence of the argument

[27] In the last instance, it will not have been doubted that soul has an infinite potency; Damascius himself says as much at *In Parm.* II.269.1 ff. Ruelle/IV.41.14 ff. Westerink-Combès, and refers us to his *Timaeus Commentary*. What the proof for soul's immortality and infinite potency in the *Timaeus Commentary* would have amounted to, though, is quite another matter. There is a certain likelihood that it is somehow connected to Damascius' idea of soul as a changing substance, a doctrine first elaborated in the *Timaeus Commentary*, as this is the immediate context for *In Parm.* II.269.1 ff. See also Plotinus *Enn.* IV.3.8.36–38; Porphyry *Sent.* 37.14 (ἀπειροδύναμος γὰρ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς φύσις), and Proclus' distinction between two kinds of infinite potency at *ET* 84–85, with the note by Dodds (1963), 245.

[28] A standard Neoplatonic doctrine, discussed most fully by Plotinus *Enn.* III.6 ('On the impassibility of the bodiless'). See Fleet (1995) for a full commentary on the treatise.

from opposites consisted in stating the presuppositions of the argument, and in drawing up a conclusive summary, without relying on elements not contained in the text itself (cf. Dam.I.207.11 and I.252). In the case of the final argument, much the same procedure is being followed: after an initial outline of all relevant assumptions and syllogisms, the commentary moves on to discussing Strato's criticisms. Finally, the entire demonstration is captured in nine hypotheses requisite for the truth of the argument (Dam.I.449–457), and eight arguments that are all in one way or another related to the idea of soul as giver of life.

One must add a note of caution, here, however. There is nothing in Dam.I.449–465 that could not have been written by Proclus, so that there remains the possibility that Damascius recycles Proclean material in his own lectures. However, I think this possibility is only slight. We know from Damascius' way of discussing the argument from opposites that he already assumed his students to be well familiar with his predecessors' work. It would then seem unlikely that Damascius would include an entire section of Proclus' commentary on the final argument without any sign of critical engagement with it. For this reason, I will attribute the entire section to Damascius in the following.

Of particular importance is the first argument (Dam.I.458), a more formalized version of the *Phaedo*'s final immortality argument, and the only argument in Damascius' 'monograph' that seems to employ the nine initial assumptions 'required for the truth of the argument' systematically and exhaustively. Its method is essentially deductive: if the nine assumptions are accepted, the conclusions follow. Basic to the argument is the idea of soul as a substance in which life is naturally present (l. 1: ζωὴν ἔχουσα συμπεφυκυῖαν; cf. *Phd.* 105d3–4), a premise validated by two assumptions set out at the beginning of the 'monograph': Dam.I.449 (soul is a substance) and Dam.I.455 (what always confers a particular form possesses it by nature). In addition, the argument assumes that soul is separable from its substrate (by Dam.I.450), while a substrate receives life from outside and is therefore also receptive of death (by Dam.I.457). As giver of life, soul cannot therefore be subject to death, because it is by nature such as to be united to one term of a pair of opposites, but not to the other (assumptions spelt out variously at Dam.I.451;452;454;456). It is thus incapable of receiving death, the opposite of life. Since soul, moreover, is already assumed to be separable, it cannot perish with the substrate. Therefore, soul retreats (by Dam.I.453) and remains immortal 'in the sense of having life that cannot be taken away' (ὡς ζωὴν ἀναφαίρετον ἔχουσα; Dam.I.458.5–6), and is hence

imperishable, since even a body with inalienable life would be imperishable. Presented in these terms, the argument is immune to Strato's worry at Dam.I.433: 'deathless' can amount to having 'inextinguishable life', if the life in question is part of the essence of soul and thus 'inalienable'.

If there is a definitive interpretation of the final argument in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, we will have found it here. Although more rigorous and technical than the Platonic text, Dam.I.458 has a fair claim to representing the substance of the final argument in a logically tight manner. The main work of this section of the commentary, it seems, has been accomplished. So what is the purpose of the remaining seven arguments? One basic characteristic of the succeeding arguments is that they are more 'topical' than the first argument, i.e. they do not present a general account of the final argument, but focus on specific aspects of the key terms 'soul', 'life' and 'death'. They reach the same conclusion, that soul is immortal, from different starting-points, with no internal logical sequence apparent to me. Without wanting to press the point too far, the seven arguments from Dam.I.459–465 may be seen as a commentary on specific steps in the final argument (Dam.I.458), allowing the commentator to isolate specific concepts and problems, and to push the reflection on soul's own nature and its relation to its substrate beyond the letter of the *Phaedo* text.

If the emphasis in the first argument, for instance, was specifically on soul's nature as a substance separable from its bodily substrate, the second argument tackles the question of soul and its relation to life (Dam.I.459). It begins with the protasis 'if soul is only the giver of life' (εἰ ἐπιφέρουσα μόνον ἐστὶ τὴν ζωήν), where the force of 'only' (μόνον) suggests one of two possibilities. Either the thought is that we are now to assume not that soul is a substance of some sort, but simply that it is something which regularly confers life, and must therefore possess the life that it gives 'from itself' (οἴκοθεν). Thus, although the second argument arrives at the same conclusion as the first, it does so via a different route, i.e. by moving away from the stronger and metaphysically more loaded assumption of the first argument (soul is a *substance* that has life connaturally), and focusing instead simply on the way in which soul possesses the life that it bestows, irrespective of its relation to any substrate.

Alternatively, the μόνον may serve to emphasize that soul is in no way the life that is given (ἐπιφερομένη), i.e. the life in a substrate, but only the giver of life (ἐπιφέρουσα). This difference between an active and a passive understanding of soul's relation to life played an important role

in the earlier debate with Strato. At Dam.I.448.9, our commentator had argued that we need to assume the separability of soul from the outset because 'if soul were in something else, e.g. a substrate, it would not be what is conferring life, but the life that has been conferred'. On this second reading, the opening line of Dam.I.459 serves to emphasize the familiar point that soul cannot be identified with the life in a substrate; on the first reading, the emphasis is much less on the separability of soul from the substrate, but rather on the less controversial fact that it gives life (cf. *Phd*. 105d2).

Whichever alternative one chooses, however, it is clear on both accounts that the purpose of the second argument is to give additional support to the idea that soul possesses life in its own nature. As long as soul has the 'connatural' life that it produces, it is immortal, and as long as it is immortal it is imperishable. Damascius acutely qualifies the claims to soul's immortality and imperishability with ἔστ' ἂν, which leaves open the possibility that soul may cease to produce its own life. This possibility is closed off with the final sentence, which states that soul is always productive of life: since it is always 'gushing forth' (βρύουσα)[29] with life, it has 'a life that cannot be taken away' (ζωὴν ἀναφαίρετον ἔχει), and is therefore always what it is.

The next two arguments in Dam.I move on to consider two different modes of death from which the soul is immune, the death that occurs in a substrate on the one hand, and the death that soul might suffer when existing by itself alone on the other. Thus, central to the reasoning at Dam.I.460 is the originally Aristotelian opposition between possession (ἕξις) and privation (στέρησις), which qualify a particular substrate. If possession can be found in a given substrate, that same substrate must in principle be able to receive the opposite of possession also, i.e. privation. Death is a privation, and *qua* privation must exist in a substrate. The life that is the opposite of death, i.e. life given from something external, must therefore also exist in a substrate. The life-giving life of soul, however, is not bound to a substrate, and so not subject to the death suffered by the latter.[30]

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[29] βρύουσα: A turn of phrase paralleled by Proclus *In Tim*. III.3.1, where it applies to soul also.

[30] According to Dam.I.430, the separability of soul (which features as one of the hypotheses requisite for the truth of the final argument at Dam.I. 450) is assumed by Socrates himself. Socrates could not have inferred that soul is imperishable otherwise, and he classes soul with fire and grants that it has life as part of its essence.

Again, one might wonder what the purpose of this argument is within the structure of the commentary. One way to understand the function of the third argument would be to see it as an elaboration of the relationship between death and a substrate. The definitive version of the *Phaedo* argument at Dam.I.458 already assumes that the relationship between death and the substrate, and soul's immunity from the kind of death that befalls a substrate, can be safely inferred from the premises outlined at the beginning of this section of the commentary (specifically Dam.I.456). A conscientious commentator would presumably feel obliged to revisit the issue, and state more forcefully the reason why soul must be immune from the substrate's death.

The objection that there might still be a kind of death to which the life that exists independently of a substrate is subject is dealt with in the fourth argument (Dam.I.461). Since soul gives life wherever it is present, life is 'consubstantial' with the form of soul, which can be taken to imply that soul is alive 'in accordance with its proper form.'[31] The argument presupposes that soul is also essentially separable from all involvement with the body and the world of generation, so that it is also *only* form and nothing besides. It follows that soul *qua* form cannot wear itself out by its essential being (viz. its being irrespective of all accidental relations) in accordance with its form. Essential being is never tiresome for something, only non-being and what is adventitious. Therefore, soul by itself cannot wear itself out, even though it may become weary in its involvement with non-being in the world of generation.

We have already encountered the worry that soul may become exhausted when existing by itself at Dam.I.443, directly after the list of Strato's criticisms.[32] Importantly, however, the answer given to the difficulty in the fourth argument does not strictly answer the issue raised at Dam.I.443, that soul can exhaust itself if it is assumed to have only a finite potency. To say that soul is only form and contains nothing adventitious does not strictly rule out the possibility that its power to exist may somehow be limited. It is uncertain, therefore, that Dam.I.461, which maintains that soul is pure form, provides an answer to Dam.I.443, which worries over the possibility that soul's power to exist may be limited. Although both the objection at Dam.I.443 and the immortality argument at Dam.I.461 address the question in what way soul might wear itself out

[31] Cf. Porphyry *Sent.* 37.17 f.: οὕτω ψυχὴ εἶδος οὖσα ζωτικὸν κτλ.
[32] See above, p. 136.

(καμεῖται), there is no obvious relation between the two. It is possible that Dam.I.461 was designed to sidestep the issue of limited potency, by focussing on whether the soul can wear itself out through its involvement in generation. But one cannot overcome the feeling that the move to ignore the problem raised at Dam.I.443 is hardly legitimate. In any case, we can easily see how the fourth argument might act as a footnote to the full reconstruction of the *Phaedo* argument at Dam.I.458: if one assumes that soul is a substance capable of separate existence (cf. Dam.I.458.2.4), does this amount to saying that it has a *perpetual* separate existence?

The fifth argument (Dam.I.462) relies on a more general causal principle to support the idea that soul cannot be subject to the death of the substrate: that which brings about one of two opposites, for example the sun bringing about light, will destroy the other opposite, e.g. darkness.[33] Thus, soul, which brings about life in the substrate, will destroy approaching death first (i.e. before being itself destroyed by death). Underlying the logic of this argument is the assumption that a cause must always be greater than its effect and also greater than the opposite of that effect. Here, soul's immunity to the death that is approaching a substrate is isolated and brought into the larger context of Neoplatonic causality. At Dam.I.462, therefore, we find a different attempt to prove that soul is immune to death, adding further support to the main version of the argument at Dam.I.458, which had assumed that soul is immune from approaching death simply in virtue of being separate.

The sixth argument (Dam.I.463) exploits the assumption that whatever always brings about a property in other things must have that same property as part of its essential nature. Soul gives life to non-living things, and therefore is alive 'according to its *hyparxis*' (καθ' ὕπαρξιν), where the term *hyparxis* is unlikely to mean anything very different from *ousia* or 'essential nature'.[34] What is original to argument six, however, is the idea that bestowing life on non-living things is equivalent to bestowing non-dying (τὸ μὴ ἀποθνήσκειν) upon them. If the soul can thus be said to bring up non-dying, it must also have non-dying as part of its essence,

[33] The principle that what produces an effect F in something is also greater than the opposite of F is deduced from the more general notion that causes are greater than their effects.

[34] Steel (1994), 82–83 makes a convincing case for distinguishing two basic senses of *hyparxis* in Proclus: the term can describe either the *essence* of something or its *existence*. The first sense is relevant here. See also Klitenic-Wear & Dillon (2007), 43, for some more complex uses of *hyparxis* in Porphyry and Proclus, which however do not apply here.

and thus be 'deathless'. In the same way, it can be proved that soul is imperishable also: since by virtue of conferring life it also confers non-perishing (τὸ μὴ φθείρεσθαι), it will be imperishable 'according to its essential nature (*hyparxis*)'. The argument thus provides a simpler, more immediate way of arriving at the conclusion that soul is imperishable than, for example, Dam.I.458 and Dam.I.459. Once it is admitted that one can infer soul's essence from the properties it bestows on other things, its being alive, deathless and imperishable can all be demonstrated by the same method of inference.

The seventh argument expands on the central point made in argument four, that soul is only form (cf. μόνον εἶδος at 461.1 and 464.3). In argument four, the emphasis was on the fact that there is nothing external or adventitious to soul's essence which could wear it out, whereas in argument seven the point is that soul as pure form does not have any internal divisions. If soul is (i) an essence that is alive, (ii) *qua* form always is what it is in all respects, and (iii) nothing besides form, then (iv) soul cannot be what it is in one way, but not in another, or one thing potentially, and one thing actually. Thus, if soul's essence is only 'being alive', it cannot also be mortal or perishable in some respects.

The final argument (Dam.I.465) revisits the relation between life and death, now understood in terms of possession and privation. Transition from one state to the other is an instance of change, but the soul is the cause of change. Hence, soul precedes all change, and is unchanging in its essence. It is thus immune to the kind of change that death implies. Familiar Neoplatonic assumptions underpin this reasoning: firstly, the principle that a cause must be greater than its effects and beyond them (ἐπέκεινα); and secondly, that soul is the source of change in the world of generation, an idea that is at least partly inspired by the immortality proof of Plato's *Phaedrus*.

6. *Concluding Evaluation*

It is time to consider the philosophical merits of Damascius' discussion of the final argument more generally, and to reach some conclusions about the relative success of his defence of Plato. An apparent weakness in the commentaries is the unproven assumption that soul is separable from its bodily substrate. This assumption forms the basis for Damascius' refutation of Strato, as well as the proofs of immortality contained in the 'monograph'. Whether or not it is in fact what Socrates and his

interlocutors in the *Phaedo* believe, one may justly fear that simple denial of the assumption will collapse the whole edifice of reasoning. To be sure, for the Neoplatonic interpreters of the *Phaedo*, the separability of soul is a matter of course, which they assume has been proven already in the dialogue, in Socrates' second defence speech. For the soul to know the forms and to perfect its activity means to turn towards itself; but if soul's activity is separate, its essence must be separate also. Yet the lack of explicit engagement with the issue of the soul's separability in the context of the final argument is an omission that is hard to justify. It is surely disingenuous of Damascius to assume a premise that could not possibly have been granted by his adversary.

On the other hand, some credit must go to the last Diadochus for presenting explicitly the assumptions required to make the argument work, and to deduce the soul's immortality from them through a rigorous process of deduction. This we have seen to be the case with the first argument in the 'monograph' (Dam.I.458). There are three other points that seem to me to suggest that Damascius took Strato seriously. Firstly, Damascius gives different reasons for the view that soul possesses life essentially, not accidentally, quite beyond anything we find in the *Phaedo* (cf. *Phd.* 105d3–4). His point that a body would be imperishable if it possessed 'inalienable life' belongs here; as does the view that soul is productive of its own life (Dam.I.458.459). Secondly, the move from 'immortal' to 'imperishable' is on the whole much more explicit than in Plato's *Phaedo*, and clearly seen as an inferential step that needs to be reasoned for carefully. Quite remarkable in this respect is Damascius' attempt to take a short-cut to the desired conclusion, in his sixth argument, which infers that soul, since it imparts non-perishing, must therefore be itself imperishable. Thirdly, and lastly, Damascius is surely right not to assume that the only possible way in which soul could perish is at the moment when it separates itself from the body. To make such an assumption, which some commentators have claimed to find throughout the final argument, is to render the whole demonstration null and void, since it is at least conceivable that some other cause could destroy soul when it is by itself.[35] It is remarkable with how much ingenuity our commentator tackles the problem. As we have seen, Dam.II.80 considers the strange possibility of soul destroying another soul, while Dam.I.461 gives a clever argument to the effect that what is purely form cannot wear itself out, and so cannot

[35] Cf. O'Brien (2007), 160–161.

perish by itself. In the same context, Damascius seems to have played the devil's advocate, assuming that soul might perish by itself in the sense of exhausting its own limited *dunamis*. How he would have solved the problem, we do not know. But as his commentary stands, the final argument contains at least one unanswered *aporia*.

7. *A Final Note on the Argument for Immortality in Proclus'* Elements of Theology

If Damascius' attempt to shore up the *Phaedo*'s final argument in his 'monograph' contains a series of original arguments that set the relation between soul and life into a wider perspective beyond the letter of the text, an even more elaborate attempt to systematically ground the final argument in Neoplatonic metaphysical principles features in Proclus' *Elements* (propositions 186–189). The conclusion of Proclus' argument, that soul is both 'indestructible and imperishable' (187.8) is strikingly similar to Socrates' own conclusion to the final argument in Plato's *Phaedo* at 106e1–3.[36] I shall thus treat it as an interpretation of Plato's *Phaedo* at least in parts, while fully aware that the *Elements* cannot count as commentary as such, since they freely use philosophical material from a range of Platonic dialogues and elsewhere.

Fundamental to Proclus' reworking and extension of the final argument is an epistemological point: the soul is capable of knowing the principles superior to itself, i.e. the forms. Hence, it must *a fortiori* know itself, since it is placed on a lower scale in the cosmos (186.9–11). With knowledge of self thus derived from knowledge of forms, the concept of 'self-reversion' is next used to argue that a self-knowing thing must also be incorporeal.[37] Whatever has self-knowledge, argues Proclus, has the capacity to revert upon itself (in the sense that it is able to recognize itself as a knower, and has itself as its own object), and whatever reverts upon itself cannot be bodily, nor inseparable from body. If a body reverted upon itself, every part of it would have to be conjoined with every other part, which is impossible given that bodies are divisible and occupy positions in space (prop. 15). But if self-reversion is incorporeal according to

[36] One slight difference is that Socrates uses the word ἀδιάφθορόν for 'imperishable', while Proclus has ἄφθαρτος.

[37] See also Steel (2006) for a rich account of Proclus' account of self-reversion and self-constitution.

καὶ τὸ γνωστικόν, ᾗ τοιοῦτον, ζῃ). Knowlege, on this line of argument, causally precedes life because anything that shares in it is necessarily alive, while the converse is not true.[39] Thus, if one assumes that soul has knowledge and is nothing other than knowledge, it cannot contain a lifeless element, since it is alive *qua* knower. For in order to contain a lifeless element, it would have to contain a part without knowledge, and so be a composite of knowledge and non-knowledge, contradicting the assumption that it is a knower and nothing besides.

If soul can be described as a principle of life in so far as it has knowledge, however, it is also like other living things in the sense that it posseses its own life by participation. As Proclus goes on to explain, to make soul only a principle of life would be to cut it off from participation in the intellect, where the primary source of all life and everlastingness is located.[40] Although this foray into the hierarchical metaphysics of Neoplatonism might seem far removed from Plato's own arguments for immortality, one should note here that one 'proof-text' Proclus can bring as evidence that Plato located life in the primary sense in the intelligible realm is Socrates' enigmatic remark at *Phd*. 106d5–6, that 'god at least and the form of life itself and anything else that is immortal are never destroyed'.[41]

The next step in Proclus' argument consists in giving conceptual support to the idea that soul has life in itself (that it is αὐτόζως). So far, Proclus has established that soul participates in the higher life of the intellect and gives life to bodies. Proposition 186 had taken soul's self-knowledge as the starting-point for the demonstration of immortality. One consequence of self-knowledge is the possibility of self-reversion, which Proclus now links with the key concept of being 'self-constituted' (αὐθυπόστατος), i.e. being the cause of one's own being. If the soul, by recognizing itself as a knower and activating its own innate reason-principles, reverts onto itself and perfects its being in this way, the source of its being *simpliciter* will also lie in itself.[42] Soul, then, is the cause of its own being; but, as we have seen from proposition 188, the essential character of soul's being is being alive *qua* knowing thing. At this point (prop.

[39] Cf. prop. 101, and notes *ad loc*. in Dodds (1963).

[40] On Proclus' account, life in soul is thus present both because it derives from soul's own self-constituting nature and because soul participates in a higher cause. See prop. 40 with Dodds' comments *ad loc*.

[41] See n. 10 above.

[42] The convertability of self-reversion and self-constitution is established in props. 42–43.

189), Proclus adds a supporting reason why soul must be seen as essentially alive: it brings life to bodies simply by being, not by any conscious activity such as choice or calculation; hence its being must be being alive. If soul, therefore, is the cause of its own being, and its being is being alive, it follows that it also the source of its own life.

In summary, we can conclude that Proclus' argument for soul's immortality in the *Elements of Theology* rests centrally on the capacity of soul for knowledge of itself and the forms. As we have seen, a first line of argument reaches the conclusion that soul is 'immortal and imperishable' on the grounds that self-knowledge implies self-reversion, which in turn implies incorporeality. In a second argument, the soul's capacity for knowledge again occupies a crucial role, this time tightening the conceptual link between soul's essential nature and the life that it posseses. Philosophically, Proclus' argument is an impressive achievement, since it unites two central themes in Plato's immortality arguments, soul's ability to understand reality more fully than the senses, and its capacity to bring life wherever it is present. In Proclus, the sister concepts of self-reversion and self-constitution constitute the vital link between the two powers of the soul.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFTER DEATH: THE *PHAEDO* MYTH AND ITS NEOPLATONIC INTERPRETERS

1. *Preliminaries*

With the case for immortality concluded, Socrates returns to a conviction he had voiced at the beginning of the dialogue: after death, there is a better future for the good than for the wicked (*Phd.* 63c). The doctrine of immortality, in other words, is not merely a neutral and reasonable assertion of an ontological fact, but closely tied up with the belief that a providential order will punish wickedness and reward virtue. Thus, Socrates frames his afterlife account with some comments that drive home the importance of the soul's 'education and nurture' for the life to come (107c1–d5; 114d1–115a2). If dying amounted to the soul's complete separation from everything, it would be a 'godsend' for the wicked, because they would escape their own vice effortlessly upon death. For this reason, Socrates urges that there are afterlife destinations that accord with the way each soul has lived its past embodied life. Although Socrates warns us not to expect an exact account of these destinations, we can be confident that the truth about our souls and their fate after death is 'either this or something like this' (ἢ ταῦτ' ἐστὶν ἢ τοιαῦτα; 114d2–3).

It is in this final section of the *Phaedo*, then, that the two main themes of Plato's dialogue and the present study, death and immortality, are most clearly brought together. The central interpretative question is not, I think, what the overall purpose of the myth within the dialogue is, since Socrates himself is quite explicit on this point. By repeating to ourselves 'like a spell' (114d6) what happens to our souls after death, we can become confident that practising death in the philosopher's manner will reap rich rewards.

More difficult to pin down are the parts of the *Phaedo* myth that are 'mythical' (in the sense that we should not believe them to be exactly like this), and those parts that can be taken as philosophically or scientifically true. If we take a closer look at the structure of Socrates' narrative from 107c1 onwards, it seems difficult to single out one individual part

of it as 'mythical'. The myth is introduced with the tale of an afterlife journey, the source of which is left deliberately vague by Socrates (cf. λέγεται; 107d5), although he hints at its provenance from 'rites and observances'. Souls are guided by a spirit to some unspecified place of judgment, from which they proceed to Hades, to be reborn again after long periods of time. Virtuous souls follow their guide willingly and find the region that belongs to them, while wicked souls wander along in confusion and isolation. The next part of the myth is ostensibly designed to give a more detailed account of the regions to which souls travel, but in fact provides a much more general account of the earth's shape, position, stability and size before turning to its lower and upper regions (108d–110b). The 'true earth' is situated in the ether, and we live in one of the earth's hollows. Only at 110b1, when he turns to describing the beauty of the 'true earth' in more detail, does Socrates use the word *mythos*. There follows a theory of the earth's hollows, with which it is pierced through and which constitute an intricate network that explains the flow of underground rivers from and into Tartarus. The most important rivers are Oceanus, Acheron, Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus (111c–113c), which lead to different places of punishment: those of mediocre disposition go to the Acherusian lake (113d–e), those who are incurably wicked to Tartarus 'from which they never emerge' (113e), and those who have committed great errors to Tartarus via Cocytus or Pyriphlegethon depending on their misdeeds, with a prospect of redemption should they gain their victims' forgiveness (114a–b). Once souls are purified, they move up to dwell on the earth, from where they may rise again to even more 'beautiful abodes' (114c).

On the face of it, only the description of the true earth at 110b is explicitly introduced as a *mythos*, but what about the preceding theory of the earth and its regions or the subsequent theory of hollows? Are these parts to be taken as good natural philosophy that has to be supplemented with a mythical account where reality is beyond the reach of our senses and conjectures (i.e. the nature of the true earth in the ether)? And why does Socrates blend truth and fiction, science and religion in such a peculiar way?

The aim of this chapter will be to approach the place and function of the dialogue's myth through the eyes of the Neoplatonic commentators on the *Phaedo*.[1] The notes from Damascius' *Commentaries on the Phaedo*

[1] Some important studies on the *Phaedo* myth are Sedley (1990); Ebert (2002). An insightful critique of Plato's afterlife myths in the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*

prop. 15, soul must also be separable from the body. For according to a principle first clearly expressed by Aristotle and widely adopted by Neoplatonists in antiquity, we can infer from a thing's activities to its essence, because all activities proceed from essence (prop. 16).[38] What is inseparable from the body in essence cannot develop any activity separate from it, since no separate activity can proceed from inseparable essence; or else, absurdly, activity would be superior to essence. For what is separable is self-sufficient by itself, while what is inseparable depends for its existence on something else.

Soul's capacity to know principles superior to itself thus stands at the beginning of a chain of reasoning that is aimed at establishing its independence from bodies. If self-knowledge is self-reversion, and self-reversion an incorporeal process, soul must be 'neither corporeal substance nor inseparable from the body' (οὔτε σωματική ἐστιν ουσία οὔτε σώματος ἀχώριστος; 186.8). Therefore, soul cannot perish either by dissolution into its elements, since it is incorporeal, and so incomposite, nor can it perish with a substrate. It is thus both 'indestructible and imperishable' (ἀνώλεθρος καὶ ἄφθαρτος;187.8).

Proclus' defence of immortality does not stop with the conclusion that soul is 'indestructible and imperishable', but instead goes on to give an account of how soul relates to life in propositions 188–189. This part of the argument most closely relates to the final argument in Plato's *Phaedo*, although, unlike Socrates in the *Phaedo*, it explicitly sets out to connect the soul's cognitive capacity with its role as life-giving principle. At proposition 188, soul's relationship with life is carefully defined in the following terms: 'every soul is at once a principle of life and a living thing' (πᾶσα ψυχὴ καὶ ζωή ἐστι καὶ ζῶν). If soul bestows life upon living bodies, it must either be a principle of life, or a living thing, or both together. Soul cannot simply be a living thing without being a principle of life, because in that case it would have to be a compound of life and not-life. The assumption here is that the life in a living thing can only be explained with reference to a principle in which the living thing participates. But if it comes to have its life by participation, it is reasonable to think that the living thing itself will not only be *living* but also much else besides that is non-living. But, says Proclus at 188.11–13, soul cannot contain a lifeless element, for it has self-knowledge, and 'knowledge is a kind of life and what has knowledge is as such alive' (ζωὴ γὰρ ἡ γνῶσις,

[38] Cf. Aristotle *De an*. 402b21–403a12.

will be my main source in what follows, although I will occasionally supplement them with material from Proclus and Olympiodorus. Damascius himself tells us that the myth is to be divided up into three different parts, and I shall follow his instructions (Dam.II.84). First there is a bridging section which unites what follows with what precedes it; then follows a description of the earth, regarding its size and regions; and finally, a division of souls into their proper destinations.

Before turning to what Damascius has to say about each of these sections, some methodological remarks are in order, however. The first principle in the Neoplatonic treatment of Plato's afterlife myths is that the three myths in the *Gorgias*, the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* are complementary descriptions of a single reality. The characteristics of each myth are explained in terms of their greater fit with the dialogue's overall aim.[2] The myth in the *Gorgias* deals specifically with the judges; the one in the *Republic* with the souls that are judged; and the one in the *Phaedo* with the places of judgement that are allotted to each soul.[3] The places of judgment correspond to the 'destinations' (λήξεις) of souls, i.e. their 'rank in this universe' (τάξις ἐν τῷδε τῷ παντὶ) assigned to them after death 'according to their merits' (κατ' ἀξίαν).[4] Fundamental to this conception is the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*. At *Rep*. X.617d–e, a speaker brings the message of Lachesis to the souls in the afterlife and throws the lots (τοὺς κλήρους) out for them to choose. In the *Republic*, however, the emphasis is not on the 'locations' that are involved in the souls' choice of lots, but rather on the psychology behind the particular choices that souls make. It belongs to the *Phaedo* myth to account for the locations where souls undergo judgment and punishment.

2. *The Afterlife Journey:* Phd. *107c–108c*

For an introduction to the beginning of Socrates' afterlife tale, we can do no better than turn to a programmatic statement by Proclus, who is very

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is offered by Annas (1982). Alt (2002) surveys how different Platonists responded to a number of problems in Plato's afterlife myths. The scholarship on Plato's general use of myth is vast; valuable contributions include Frutiger (1930); Brisson (1998). Partenie (2009) brings together a useful collection of recent papers on the subject with ample bibliography.

[2] Cf. Proclus *In Tim*. III.323.14–348.20.

[3] Cf. Dam.I.471 and Westerink (1977), note *ad loc*. for further references.

[4] Dam.I.467.

sensitive to the religious and mystical references both in the *Phaedo*'s final myth and the earlier discussion of suicide. In a discussion of two different kinds of myth, one working from images and one hieratic, he begins by outlining the different methods germane to each:

> The first method, which uses images (ἡ μὲν δὶ εἰκόνων μέθοδος), belongs to genuine philosophers; the second, which is an indication of the divine essence by means of ineffable symbols (ἡ δὲ δὶ ἀπορρήτων συνθημάτων τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἔνδειξις), belongs to those presiding over the most mystic initiation (τοῖς τῆς μυστικωτέρας ἡγεμόσιν τελεσιουργίας) with which Plato himself often sees fit to reinforce the credibility and evidence of his doctrines.
>
> He proves this in the *Phaedo*, when he honours the silence which befits what is taught in secret discourses, that 'we, who are men, are as in a prison', when he calls the initiations to bear witness to the different kinds of fate for the soul when descending down to Hades whether purified or still impure, and again, when, by means of sacred traditional rites, he conjectures (τεκμαιρόμενος) the existence of bifurcations and crossroads, all things filled with symbolic doctrine, and he bases his conjectures on the accounts repeated by the poets, the ascents and descents of souls, Dionysiac passwords, the legendary sin of the Titans, and the crossways of Hades, and the 'errance', and all such things. (*In Remp*. I.84.26–85.12)

We have here in effect an inventory list of the initiatory material in the dialogue: from the prohibition of suicide ἐν ἀπορρήτοις, which we have already encountered, to the fate of souls in Hades, to the exact particulars of the myth (crossways and the errance of souls), all can be related to divine symbols in the mysteries and the writings of the poets. The hieratic aspects of the *Phaedo*, according to Proclus, are a distinguishing feature of the dialogue—after all, this and not any other Platonic dialogue is his best example for the method δὶ ἀπορρήτων συνθημάτων. The symbolic method is to be distinguished from that of the Pythagoreans, who communicate their teachings through images (the first method in the passage quoted above), for example by expressing the divine nature through numbers and figures.[5] For Proclus, the method of teaching through ineffable symbols is characteristic of the Orphics, and he has no doubt that Plato is actively striving to imitate Orpheus in his afterlife description—he makes direct comparisons between Platonic and Orphic accounts of the afterlife at *In Remp*. II.338.10–341.4.[6]

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[5] For this distinction, see also Proclus *TP* I.20.6–12.

[6] For a discussion of the Neoplatonists' account of Orphic influences on Plato, cf. Kingsley (1995), 112–132.

It is in the passage cited from Proclus, if anywhere, that we find a Neoplatonic summary of the importance and import of this part of the *Phaedo* myth. The broad outlines of the passage are still reflected in the scattered notes from Damascius' lectures, discussed according to the Proclean principle that the myth is 'hieratic'. Damascius thus claims that 'just as the other arts and sciences have recourse to philosophy for confirmation, philosophy ascends to hieratic science to establish her own doctrines' (Dam.II.109). According to the commentator, Socrates' claim that souls need guides in the other world, for instance, rests on two arguments. One is philosophical, namely that there are many paths, so that different guides are necessary to find the right road to Hades for each soul; the other is 'hieratic', and relates to the wandering of Demeter 'who went astray because there were different roads' (Dam.II.108), or the sacrifices to Hecate Trioditis (Dam.I. 496) by crossroads and representations of crossroads in other rites. (Dam.II.108.9–10). There is one road forking that connects the road upwards from the spheres of the planets, fixed stars and Olympus; the road downwards to Acheron, Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus; and one middle road to air, water and earth. Orpheus too proclaims these things (Dam.I.497).

Socrates' introduction to his afterlife credo at *Phd.* 107d ('now it is said that when a man has breathed his last …') with the unspecific 'it is said' (λέγεται) touches on the epistemological question at the heart of this section of the myth: how can we tell that the tale of an afterlife journey with a guiding daemon is true, or even like the truth?

> Who are the speakers? For Plato claims that this 'is said' (λέγεται) about things in Hades. First, the unconscious heartbeat of our common notions; secondly the theologians; thirdly the oracles of the Gods; fourthly the mysteries; fifthly the apparitions of the Gods themselves.
>
> (Dam.II.93; cf. Dam.I.476)

The conjunction of 'common notions' with theologians, oracles, mysteries and divine autophanies is curious, but demonstrates the belief that intuition and revelation both contribute to our understanding of things to come. Damascius' notes devote a significant amount of space to various problems with the 'hieratic' beginning section of the myth (Dam.I.472–502; II.86–113), but have only a limited philosophical interest. Proclus, in his lost *Phaedo Commentary* would have seized the opportunity to put the guardian spirits and companions of souls into a wider daemonological perspective, and Damascius' comments as so often refine Proclus' view on the subject. Some salient points that emerge from the discussion

are that the place of judgment for souls is in the ether, although Damascius queries this scenario, as it would bring souls belonging to quite different orders before the same judges (Dam.I.481.4–7; see p. 181 below for more detail). One important question raised, presumably by Proclus, is why judgment would have to occur in a particular place at all (Dam.I.499). For given that the divine is present everywhere, there should be no reason why one place would be more suitable for the purposes of judgement than any other. But, replies Proclus, removal from the lower regions into the ether makes souls more susceptible to treatment, and some places are more suited to divine illumination (ἔλλαμψις) than others. In the murkiest reaches of matter, for example, the influence of the divine will only be poorly revealed in comparison to the perfect harmonious motions of the planets. Another argument Proclus adduces is directly drawn from religious practice: we prefer to appear to the gods in holy places even though they are omnipresent.[7]

3. *Which Earth Is the 'True Earth'?*

The religious aspects that have featured prominently in the previous section cover but one part of the *Phaedo* myth, and recede into the background in the commentators' discussion of Socrates' account of the earth described at *Phd.* 108d–111c. From two notes in Damascius, we can tell that there was a serious controversy over the question which earth Socrates is talking about:

> Ὅτι τὴν γῆν οἱ μὲν ἀσώματόν φασι τὴν ἐνταῦθα λεγομένην, οἱ δὲ σωματικήν· καὶ τούτων ὅλον μὲν τὸν κόσμον Ἁρποκρατίων, τὸν δὲ ὑπὸ σελήνην Θεόδωρος· τῶν δὲ ἀσώματον τὴν μὲν ἰδέαν Δημόκριτος, τὴν δὲ φύσιν Πλούταρχος.
>
> Ὅτι πρὸς πάντας ἑνὶ λόγῳ ἀντιρρητέον ὡς περὶ τῆς αὐτῆς τοῖς γεωγράφοις διαλέγεται ὁ Σωκράτης.
>
> Some say the earth here is incorporeal, others that it is corporeal. Of the latter group, Harpocration thinks the whole universe is meant, Theodorus the sublunary world; of those who think of it as incorporeal, Democritus believes that it is the idea, Plutarch that it is Nature. (Dam.I.503)
>
> To all these views there is one common reply: the earth Socrates is talking about is the one of our geography books. (Dam.I.504)

[7] The 'true earth' is also said to contain places where the gods really dwell, and the dwellers have communion with the gods through omens, oracles, visions and the like (cf. *Phd.* 111b–c).

Among the earlier *Phaedo* commentators, only Harpocration and Theodorus (of Asine) seem to have embraced the difficult task of referring the description of the earth and its regions to a physical reality. Socrates himself is quite clear that the earth in his account is placed 'in the pure heaven that contains the stars' (109b7–8), which 'most of those who are used to talking about such things call the ether' (b8–c1). Theodorus reasonably takes Socrates' words to mean that the 'heights of the earth' reach just below the moon, into the ether that fills the realm between earth and heaven.[8] Harpocration, on the other hand, appears to run up against the text of the *Phaedo* when he says that the true earth is the whole universe, earth and heaven together. His motivation is a matter for speculation. Some commentators have suspected the influence of Numenius' eschatology, according to which the soul descends into the body from the outermost heaven gradually through the planetary spheres.[9] Having the true earth encompass the whole universe would allow Harpocration to situate the 'heights of the earth', the blessed afterlife location of souls, in the highest regions of heaven (the fixed stars). Damascius' argument against the views put forward by Harpocration and Theodorus states that the true earth is under the heaven and 'surrounded by ether as our earth is by air' (Dam.I.506.2). Presumably, his point is that the earth cannot be the same as the sublunary world, since it is *surrounded* by ether (against Theodorus' view), nor that it can include heaven, as it is placed underneath heaven (against Harpocration's view).

On the side of those who interpret the earth as incorporeal we find the names of the otherwise little-known Platonist Democritus and Plutarch (of Athens). Democritus' view that the 'true earth' is 'the idea' runs against the text rather obviously, since Socrates describes a world with evidently corporeal features, as Damascius can point out. The suggestion put forward by Plutarch, that the true earth is (incorporeal) Nature is puzzling as it stands; Westerink thinks here of the λόγοι (reason-principles) of Nature which the myth is supposed to lead us up to if interpreted correctly (supported perhaps by *Phd.* 110d5–6, with the suggestive phrase ἀνὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον). Damascius criticises Plutarch's view on the basis of Socrates' description of the earth at *Phd.* 111a–c: Nature as an incorporeal principle 'cannot be an abode of blessed souls and inhabited by Gods' (Dam.I.505.4–5).

[8] Cf. Deuse (1973), 168–169 (Test. 42).
[9] So Westerink (1977), 254 f.; Gioè (2002), 466–468.

From Damascius' summary response to earlier interpretations that Socrates' earth is the earth of our geography books, we might expect that his commentary will be mainly concerned to show that there are no manifest absurdities involved in taking this part of the myth as literal truth. And indeed, Damascius' comments on Socrates' four claims about the earth (its central position, spherical shape, stability and very great size) contain an interesting defence of Platonic cosmology (Dam.I.512–522). The earth's spherical shape, for example, can be explained with reference to final causality, in so far as the sphere is most like the Good or the One (Dam.I.516.1–6). The paradigmatic cause for the earth's spherical shape is the intelligible cosmos, which is all-complete (cf. *Tim.* 31b) and most comprehensive (Dam.I.516.3–8). The demiurgic Intellect functions as the efficient cause of the earth's sphericity, because what Intellect creates is permanent, and the sphere is the most permanent shape (Dam.I.516.8–9).

Particularly interesting in this part of Damascius' commentary is the rapprochement between the cosmology of the *Timaeus* and that of the *Phaedo*.[10] In his *Timaeus Commentary*, Proclus had already brought the two into close proximity:

> Without doubt the place which we inhabit is crude, shadowy and 'corroded by a brimy water' (*Phd.* 110e3), but there is another 'true earth' (110a1) which contains the places the gods inhabit and 'sacred groves' (111b7) and a beauty similar to that in heaven. One should not be surprised, then, if now too the earth is said to be 'the foremost and most senior of the gods who have come to be in this universe' (*Tim.* 40c2–3), since she has such great sublimity and such beauty, and resembles 'one of those balls made of twelve pieces of leather' (110b7), just as heaven has been designed by the demiurge in the shape of a dodecahedron, according to what Plato says further on (*Tim.* 55c4–6). (*In Tim.* III.141.16–24)

In the passage quoted, Proclus rightly picks up Socrates' teasing nod towards the sphere at *Phd.* 110b7.[11] The notes from Damascius' lectures follow Proclus in taking the *Phaedo* cosmology seriously as science, and relating the true earth passage to the *Timaeus*.[12] The divine status of the earth in particular connects the geographical part of the myth with the

[10] On Proclus' theology of the earth in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, see also Steel (2009).

[11] Sedley (1990) makes a convincing case that '[t]he [*Phaedo*] myth is also an introduction to teleological cosmology' (360) and in this respect anticipates the *Timaeus*.

[12] See also Dam.I.527 and Dam.II.132 on the sense in which the earth is 'like a ball made up of twelve strips of leather' (*Phd.* 110b6–7).

question of souls' judgment and punishments in the afterlife. The judgment of souls itself takes place in the ether, according to a line of interpretation that goes back to Iamblichus, who in all likelihood argued that 'ethereal divinities judge, punish, and purify souls in their ethereal vehicles in the ethereal cosmos'.[13] Proclus, in what Finamore calls 'a masterpiece of Neoplatonic interpretation of Platonic text'[14] had harmonised Plato's different descriptions of the place of judgment in *Republic* X.614b–c, *Gorgias* 523e–524a and *Phaedo* 107d–e. The notes from Damascius' courses reveal the influence of Proclus' view, although we find it slightly tempered with the remark that one should not think of only one place of judgment but rather of a whole procession of judgment places that has its origin in Dikê. This refinement appears to have originated with Proclus (I.482) and is taken up by Damascius (Dam.I.481.4–7).

It is from the place of judgment that souls journey on to their proper place in the afterlife. The *Phaedo*'s 'heights of the earth' are the preserve of only those souls that have lived virtuously, while those who have practised philosophy as well can expect to ascend to even more 'beautiful abodes' still (114c). Interestingly, Damascius 'amends' Socrates' twofold division of afterlife rewards by foisting his own schema of the degrees of virtues onto the text (Dam.I.551): the highest ascent, not mentioned by Socrates at all, is that of those who have completely purified themselves, while the 'more beautiful' abodes are the destination of those who have philosophised 'in a civic way' (πολιτικῶς).

The relevance of the earth's divine status to the judgment of souls emerges in Damascius' detailed description of the earth's heights. By way of analogy, he argues that if souls have a luminous body prior to their material body, so much more must we assume that the whole earth, as a divine being, has a finer body beyond its material one, as well as a soul and intelligence beyond soul (Dam.II.115). In between the earth's luminous and material bodies we must also posit a pneumatic vehicle, which accounts for the matter that constitutes the beautiful trees and animals which Socrates describes at *Phd.* 110d–111a, and also for the warmth and motion of the refined elements there (Dam.II.134). The heights of the earth, then, describe a physical reality, but their significance goes beyond that:

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[13] Dillon-Finamore (2002), 194, commenting on fr. 40 of Iamblichus' *De anima*. See Proclus *In Remp.* II.128.3–134.23.

[14] Finamore (1998), 50.

> What is said about the heights of the earth can also be understood in a physical sense (φυσικῶς): pure colours, undefiled beauty of stones, plants filled with a more divine life that have an ether-like substance, animals garbed in long-lasting pneumatic bodies, everything corresponding to the elements up there (πάντα ἀνάλογον τοῖς ἐκεῖ στοιχείοις). But because of the myth that has been woven in, we can also think of the patterns of life and the incorporeal creative principles (τὰς ζωὰς […] καὶ τοὺς λόγους τοὺς ἀσωμάτους), as well as the overseeing deities that are referred to by these names. (Dam.I.528)

The thought that we should think of the principles (λόγοι) behind the realities in the myth is extended into the realm of the gods, and here Proclus' *On the Sacred Art* suggests itself as a point of reference, as Westerink has pointed out correctly.[15] The ascent from the rational principles in Nature to higher causes is outlined by Proclus in his *Parmenides Commentary*: 'it is then necessary to put the reason-principles in some other being that will know what is within itself and whose action will be knowing as well as creative' (*In Parm*. 794.27–30; tr. Dillon, slightly modified). These principles exist on different levels in various degrees of unity, in descending order from the demiurgic intellect to souls, Nature and bodies. In sum, the *Phaedo* myth reveals that the heights of the earth exist in reality and are made of finer stuff than the earth's lower regions; it is mythical only in so far as it can lead us up to immaterial principles and higher causes.[16]

The literalistic approach to the 'true earth' is therefore entirely compatible with the 'mythical' reality that lurks behind the cosmographical reality. Indeed, according to Damascius,

> (i) Socrates indicates, firstly, that the myth is about those who inhabit the heights of the earth, but not about what has come before, where he has talked about the earth in general, nor about what comes after, where he will talk about it in more detail. (ii) Secondly, the commentator indicates that Socrates calls the myth 'beautiful' because even the appearance that it has is according to nature and contains nothing incongruous (ἀπεμφαῖνον), for which reason one can truly say that reality is 'either this or something like this', and not far removed from the mythical part.
>
> But perhaps the same thing can be both a myth and a true account (λόγος) at the same time, a true account because reality is also like this, and a myth because it is able to hint (αἰνίξασθαι δύναται) at better and higher things. (Dam.II.129)

[15] Westerink (1977), 359, n. on Dam.II.136.

[16] Corbin (1977), 92–96 notes the similarities between the pneumatic vehicle of the Neoplatonists and the celestial earth of Hurqalya in Iranian mysticism.

The first solution (i) points out that Socrates himself restricts the scope of the 'mythical' to the description of the heights of the earth, and separates the cosmology and river hydraulics from it. 'The commentator', very likely Proclus, defends Plato's apparent mingling of fact and fiction with reference to the special status of Platonic myths, which represent reality in the right way, unlike Homeric myths, where extensive allegorical interpretation is required to explain their often offensive surface meaning. Even when taken at face value, Plato's myths are harmless and generally close enough to the truth. Damascius, in a note at the beginning of his treatment of the myth (Dam.I.466), makes the same point with reference to the *Republic*, where Socrates distinguishes poetic myths from those that would be allowed in the ideal city (*Rep*. II–III).

If Plato's myths, then, are characterized by their ability to represent reality in the right way, one might still ask why one needs a myth at all at this point in the *Phaedo*, rather than a reasoned argument for the existence of Providence, for example. In response to this problem, Proclus and Damascius would have recourse to psychology. With some caution, we can attribute two different solutions to Proclus, who thinks that myths are particularly appropriate for souls that have descended into the world of generation. Firstly, Proclus argues that our souls contain λόγοι that are themselves 'images'.[17] There is therefore a close proximity between souls and images; indeed, another note on the psychology of myths even goes as far as to claim that souls not only have images, but *are* themselves the first image, since they have fallen outside the realm of true being in their descent.[18] As a second solution, Proclus offers the theory that the myth's outward form appeals to our 'passive intellect' (νοῦς παθητικός), but its content to intellection.[19] Damascius, for his part, offers two alternative explanations, one introduced at Dam.II.130.6 with an unmistakable ἄμεινον δὲ: some things are better learnt by proofs, but some by the 'more self-grown concepts' (δὶ ἐννοιῶν αὐτοφυεστέρων).[20] Behind this comment stands the idea that myths are able to activate the

[17] Dam.I.525.1–2.

[18] Dam.II.130.1–2.

[19] Dam.I.525.2–3; Dam.II.130.3–5. The substance of this theory is developed more fully at *In Remp*. II.107.14–109.3. It relies on the identification of the passive intellect with the faculty of the imagination (φαντασία). See Sorabji (2005a), 121–123.

[20] αὐτοφυέστερον: lit. 'more self-grown' or 'more spontaneous' (Westerink), here referring to the common notions within the soul. The word is often used to mean simply 'more natural', however (Ammonius *In de int*. 106.32; Simplicius *In Cat*. 356.10; *In Phys*.149.18; Philoponus *In de an*. 21.28).

pre-rational or unconscious 'common notions' that are part of the soul's innate knowledge. A second solution why myths are appealing to souls effectively derives from a Platonic notion present in, e.g., the *Politicus* and the *Laws*, according to which myths bring together seriousness and playfulness.[21]

4. *The Underground Rivers in Damascius and Olympiodorus*

In the previous section, we have seen how an accurate description of reality can function in a 'mythical' mode, by drawing our understanding to the higher realities that guide visible nature. In the case of the underground rivers outlined by Socrates at *Phd*.111c–113c, the position of the commentators on the question whether it is to be taken as literally true is more difficult to discern. Olympiodorus, as we will see, is quite prepared to defend the passage against Aristotle's attacks in the *Meteorology*, claiming that it contains both physical and ethical truths. In fact, however, most of the interpretations of the passage seem to be allegories of one kind or another. There is, then, something of a contrast with the 'true earth' passage, which Proclus and Damascius accept as a cosmological reality that can be backed up with scientific reasoning.

Damascius' comments on the rivers are on the whole inconclusive, and hardly sufficient to construct a coherent picture. His most important discussion of the subject comes at Dam.II.145. While Proclus had argued that each of the four underground rivers represents a different element, Damascius takes a wholly different approach. For Damascius, the key to interpreting the underground rivers is not to understand them as a physical allegory, as it seems to have been for Proclus, but to focus instead on their theological significance. At one level, the rivers represent the lots and destinations of souls; beyond that, they also represent the divine characters delimitation (Oceanus), purification (Acheron), chastisement through heat (Pyriphlegethon) and chastiment through cold (Cocytus).

More fruitful than Damascius' remarks for our understanding of how this part of the *Phaedo* myth was understood by the Neoplatonists is Olympiodorus' response to Aristotle's critique at *Meteor*. II.355b32–356a30. According to Aristotle, Plato's theory of the underworld rivers

[21] Cf. *Pol*. 268d–e and *Leg*. 887d. The Platonic origins of Damascius' solution at Dam.I.525.4–5 have been well brought out by Pépin (1981), who discusses Dam.I.525–526 and II.129–130 in greater detail than I can do here.

is mistaken for three reasons. Firstly, by making their motion dependent on the swellings of Tartarus, Plato cannot account for how rivers actually flow. Secondly, when postulating that the quantity of water is constant and flows in and out of the earth, the *Phaedo*'s theory does not take into account rainfall and condensation. Finally, all the rivers that we can observe end up in the sea, rather than flowing into the centre of the earth.

Against these criticisms, Olympiodorus distinguishes two different types of exegesis of the underworld rivers, one physical (though hardly in the sense we might expect) and one ethical. Aristotle unfairly takes what is said 'mythically' by Plato in physical terms: 'we should not understand what is said mythically in physical terms, since Plato has said this while hinting at something else' (*In Meteor*. 144.13f.). We are then told what implications the soul's immortality has for our lives, namely that we should either strive to become as much like god as possible, or avoid suffering punishment (*In Meteor*. 144.20f.). This triggers a lengthy digression on the nature of Plato's afterlife myths, which is summed up with the claim that 'Tartarus is not the totality of waters, but of the places of punishment' (*loc.cit*. 32f.). Plato, then, has hinted at the ethical nature of the places of punishment all along, and Aristotle got it wrong by taking them as physical rivers. Olympiodorus is clearly on the verge of allegorising the entire subject here in order to rescue Plato from Aristotelian censure.

However, if Olympiodorus also wants to maintain that the *Phaedo* myth describes a physical reality, the ethical account needs to be supplemented by a physical interpretation that gets around the difficulties posed by Aristotle. We first encounter the two modes of exegesis, ethical and physical, at *In Meteor*. 146.4–27. The passage begins with an ethical explanation of Tartarus that includes an excursus on the duration of punishment. A fundamental tenet of Neoplatonic accounts of punishment is that it has as its end purification of the wrong-doer, rather than mere retribution.[22] Therefore, the duration of punishment must be limited, since the process of purification will reach completion at some point.[23]

[22] *In Meteor*. 146.10f.

[23] Damascius (Dam.I.547; II.147) discusses the problem in the context of *Phd*. 113e, where those who are incurably wicked are said to 'never' emerge from Tartarus. He provides several ways of 'resolving' the matter, most importantly the standard explanation in terms of cosmic periods. In the same context stands a lemma criticising Iamblichus' doctrine of a permanent return to the 'original state' (Dam.II.148).

Punishment, therefore, cannot be eternal in the sense in which the divine is eternal, but merely in the weaker sense of lasting one or more cosmic periods:

> We say that the soul is punished 'everlastingly' (αἰωνίως) since we call one life of the soul and one partial period of the soul 'everlasting duration' (αἰών). For indeed one period does not suffice to purify the greatest transgressors among souls, but in life they are continuously as though in Tartarus, and this Plato called an 'everlasting duration' (αἰών).
>
> (*In Meteor.* 146.13–15)

So far, we seem to be firmly in the ethical mode of exegesis. What is the physical reality behind this part of the myth on Olympiodorus' reading, though, and is it immune to Aristotle's strictures? Having clarified the difference between 'everlasting' (αἰώνιον) and 'eternal' (ἀίδιον) in the ethical excursus on punishment, his next step lies in linking the concept of eternity with matter, which is 'made in the image of time' and produces other forms again from those that have perished before (cf. *In Meteor.* 146.23–25). The physical reality of Tartarus is matter: the constant ebbing and swelling of Tartarus symbolize the inherent unrest and struggle between opposites that characterize the world of generation.

This double-edged kind of exegesis, ethical and physical, is carried on in a discussion of the flow of the underground rivers in and out of Tartarus. Some rivers flow forth from Tartarus and return to the same place where they came from; others however flow out in an extended circle to a point opposite their source, and thus return back to Tartarus.[24] These two kinds of flows are again susceptible to Olympiodorus' double exegesis. Ethically speaking, each kind of flow is symbolic of a different relation towards genesis: those who are incurably wicked are symbolized by the rivers that turn back to Tartarus swiftly, since they are assigned to genesis, that is to say Tartarus, as punishment. Those souls, however, who have done wrong but are easy to cure of their wickedness, are not much like Tartarus. They are therefore not immediately rushed back into it, but instead remain outside genesis (i.e. Tartarus) for long lifetimes, until they finally return again to be purified of wrongs committed previously. On the physical level, on the other hand, the flow of rivers signifies the instability of the world of becoming:

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[24] At Dam.I.542 Damascius explains the rivers' flow on three different levels, in terms of (i) Socrates' own explanation at *Phd.* 112b; (ii) soul, which makes the earth a breathing living being; and (iii) higher causes as postulated by Socrates' 'second voyage' at *Phd.* 95e–100a.

> But we must say that destruction of a natural thing happens either because of an inherent weakness in the thing destroyed, as in the fire of a lamp (for the flame dies because it has been weakened by a lack of sustenance) or because of the dominance of an opposite. Here, therefore, he [*sc*. Plato] signifies destruction of a natural thing from itself by means of the rivers which flow back immediately, but by means of the river flowing into Tartarus on the opposite side he shows destruction through opposites.
> (*In Meteor*. 148.7–13)

5. *Epilogue*

With Olympiodorus' defense of the places of punishment, we have encountered ethical and physical modes of explanation that seem much like allegories of the realm of genesis, in the best fashion of a Porphyry in his *On the Cave of the Nymphs*. From the hieratic mode of teaching by symbols that Proclus discovers in the introductory account of the afterlife, to the mythical and physical explanations of the true earth, to the ethical and physical allegories of Olympiodorus, the commentators show a remarkable resistance towards any attempt to neatly delineate literal from allegorical meanings. Their own method of interpretation, we might say, is true to Plato's myth itself.

Given that the philosopher's prospect of a better lot after death can be reinforced by a variety of sources, however, what sort of immortality can he aspire to? From the text of the *Phaedo*, it is tempting to infer that a permanent discarnate state is held out as the ultimate afterlife reward to the souls of those who have purified themselves during their life on earth.[25] Some earlier Platonists had latched onto the *Phaedo*'s promise of a lasting return to some state of bliss. Porphyry, for example, is reported by Augustine to have maintained that at least the philosopher's soul would remain with the Father Intellect forever, and so escape the cycle of ascent from, and descent into, genesis.[26] Iamblichus, too, toyed

[25] Cf. *Phd*. 81a9; 114c2 ff.

[26] Augustine *De civ. dei* X.30 (I.401.5 ff. Dombart = Porphyry *De regr. an*. fr. 301 Smith): 'quod mundatam ab omnibus malis animam et cum Patre constitutam numquam iam mala mundi huius passuram esse confectus est'. The question of Porphyry's motives in allowing for a permanent escape from genesis is difficult to decide given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, which derives mainly from his lost *De regressu animae*. Augustine claims that Porphyry is formulating a Platonist doctrine to rival the Christian concept of the eternal blessedness of the saints. Porphyry's position can be explained as no more than a good exegete's attempt to reconcile the apparent tensions in the *Phaedo* text itself, however; *Phd*. 81a9 (ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον μετὰ θεῶν διάγουσα) and 114c2–5

with the thought in his *Letters* and elsewhere, possibly in his *Phaedo Commentary*, but with certainty in his work 'On the migration of the soul from the body'.[27] Our reports of Iamblichus' doctrine, admittedly, are not entirely consistent. It seems that he maintained that some souls (those of theurgists, most likely) could escape genesis fully, and remain in the intelligible world forever. In his *Letters* and his work on the soul's migration, he then seems to have toned down his view to the claim that some souls can descend back into genesis in a way that does not involve genesis, by maintaining unbroken contact with the intelligibles.

Yet Syrianus, Proclus and Damascius all take a firm stance against attempts to allow any soul a permanent return to its origin. Their sobering reply is that if the soul can descend even once, it must be in its nature to descend sometimes. As Damascius puts it at Dam.I.492:

> Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀεί τινα μένειν οὔτε ἐν τῷ νοητῷ, ὡς Ἰάμβλιχος· εἴπερ γὰρ κατῆλθεν, πέφυκεν κατιέναι ποτέ· οὔτε ἐν τῷ Ταρτάρῳ, […] πέφυκε γὰρ καὶ ἄνω ποτὲ εἶναι.
>
> It is impossible for any soul to either remain forever in the intelligible world, as Iamblichus thought it could (if it has descended, then it must be in its nature to descend sometimes), or forever in Tartarus, […] since it is also in its nature to be sometimes above.

(τούτων δὲ αὐτῶν οἱ φιλοσοφίᾳ ἱκανῶς καθηράμενοι ἄνευ τε σωμάτων ζῶσι τὸ παράπαν εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον) could be read as describing exceptions to the law of perpetual reincarnation implied by the cyclical argument. For succinct surveys of the problem in Neoplatonism, see Dodds, 304f. on Proclus, *ET* 206, and Westerink's note on Dam.I.548 (on *Phd*.114c2ff.).

[27] See Dam.I.548 with Westerink's comments *ad. loc*. On Iamblichus' position, see also Ol.10.14.8–10, and Dillon (1973), 243f., who lists the Damascius fragments as part of Iamblichus' *In Phaedonem* (fr. 5). On the relevant evidence in Iamblichus' *De mysteriis* and *De anima*, cf. Dillon-Finamore (2002) 162f.; 206.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the previous seven chapters, I have attempted to show how the *Commentaries on the Phaedo* by Olympiodorus and Damascius help us approach a number of related questions about death and immortality. I will briefly resume the results of this study for each of these questions, and reflect on some possibilities for further research.

Firstly, there is an ethical question: what is the meaning of death for our lives? Here, one must draw a distinction between two kinds of death: the natural death that occurs when the body dies and can no longer receive the soul, and the voluntary death that consists in the soul separating itself from the body as much as possible in this life. For Olympiodorus and Damascius, natural death is not to be sought for its own sake and life in the body only a relative evil as compared to the purer vision of the rational soul when it is freed from the influence of sense-perception and the imagination. Both share the view that a life of contemplation in the body is possible. As we have seen in chapter one, Olympiodorus, like Plotinus, has enough realism to admit that the body's influence on the soul may sometimes be detrimental to its truer pursuits, and for this reason he admits that suicide, the active bringing about of natural death, may sometimes be justified. I have argued that the substance of Olympiodorus' conclusion can be explained in terms of a principle of moral deliberation that assigns the highest value in ethical choices to the soul. In my view, Olympiodorus' status as a thinker about practical moral issues has been somewhat obscured by a scholarly prejudice that values intellectual achievement mainly in the realm of speculative metaphysics. There, Olympiodorus cannot compete. Yet I submit that an open-minded study of his commentaries on *Alcibiades*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*—a desideratum to this day—may increase his reputation as a philosopher and show him as a more original ethical thinker than has been thought so far.

Much more significant than natural death in the *Commentaries on the Phaedo* is the idea of voluntary death, which provides a model for how to live the philosophical life, as well as being an important step in the *Phaedo*'s demonstration of immortality. Both these aspects are worth bringing out here. As has been shown by Pierre and Ilsetraut Hadot's research, Neoplatonic commentaries should not be seen simply as 'academic' or 'professional' output, but as texts designed to instil a specific

moral attitude in the student, and to guide him along a curriculum structured with a view to his moral and intellectual progress. This approach may fruitfully be applied to the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*.[1] The moral attitude that the *Phaedo* courses are designed to develop in the student is that of purification, the dialogue's central theme according to our commentators. The soul becomes purified from the body by directly avoiding non-necessary physical pleasures, but also by developing an inner attitude of contempt for pleasure and distrusting the evidence gathered from sense-perception. Plotinus had characterized this inner attitude in terms of 'purificatory virtue', and his disciple Porphyry was even more emphatic on the value and necessity of purification in the philosopher's way of life. Olympiodorus and Damascius do not significantly depart from this way of thinking about 'voluntary' death. In chapter two, I have drawn out one particular feature of their commentaries that relates to the ethical significance of voluntary death: the question of civic engagement. The embodied philosopher has duties that potentially conflict with his pursuit of contemplation. Since our souls have a duty to care for their bodies, for example, it is only in rare cases that they can withdraw from it through self-inflicted violence. What about the philosopher's duty towards others? Should he get involved in his community, and endeavour to cultivate the kind of virtues that are instrumental for establishing just relations among citizens? Olympiodorus and Damascius are emphatic that the civic virtues are deficient on a number of counts as compared to the virtues of the true philosopher. Unfortunately, they do not offer any account of how the philosopher who has transcended civic life will be able to combine his duties towards others with his pursuit of wisdom. Perhaps this is not surprising: the *Phaedo* is, after all, Plato's most otherwordly dialogue. Yet some Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus and Porphyry, did provide an explanation of how the sage may exercise low-level virtues for the sake of others 'according to circumstances'. It would be an interesting research project to trace the question how contemplation and civic life may be compatible in the writings of other late Neoplatonists.

I turn now to a second important aspect of the notion of 'voluntary death': its connection to the doctrine of immortality. Already with Plotinus, the soul's immortal and divine nature is given visible proof by the

[1] Cf. Ol.7.2.5–6: οὐ δεῖ λόγῳ μόνῳ ἄνω καὶ κάτω θρυλεῖν τὰς καθαρτικὰς ἀρετάς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔργῳ αὐτὰς δεικνύναι ('we should not be talking over and over about the purificatory virtues only in theory, but also display them in action').

philosopher who has become pure in this life. For Olympiodorus and Damascius, the connection between the ethical thesis of the dialogue and the demonstration of the soul's immortality is even closer. Since purification implies that the soul strives to separate itself from the body, the commentators can take the immortality thesis as implied at the outset of the dialogue. Anything that achieves its perfection by becoming separate must be separable in its essence, which in turn implies that it cannot perish with the death of its substrate. The very act of philosophizing is already proof that the soul is incorporeal and separable from matter. The only reason why Socrates spells out the reasons for immortality in more detail is to guide Cebes (and so, perhaps, the student of the *Phaedo*) to a truer understanding of the soul's nature.

In the second main part of this study, we have seen how Olympiodorus and Damascius reject Iamblichus' attempts to construct the first three arguments for immortality as complete demonstrations. Sure proof that the soul is not only immortal but also imperishable is only promised with the final argument, which starts from the essence of the soul, which is living and being alive. The real hero of this part is Damascius. Especially when it comes to the arguments for immortality, Damascius disagrees with Proclus (and Syrianus) on almost all substantial issues of philosophical interpretation. I have little confidence, to be sure, that one can distill a distinctively 'Damascian' theory of immortality from the *Commentaries on the Phaedo*, unlike for example, in the case of his *Commentary on the Philebus*, where an original 'theory of pleasure' has been traced with considerable success.[2] Although the *Phaedo* may have been considered as Plato's definitive statement on the soul for centuries, Damascius' commentaries barely touch upon the radical innovations in Neoplatonic psychology that we find in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*.[3] One reason for this silence is no doubt the relatively humble place of the *Phaedo* in the Neoplatonic curriculum that would disfavour intricate metaphysical speculations more suitable to commentaries on the K2 and Everest of Platonic dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*.

That said, I think it is possible to appreciate the subtle dialectician and careful reader of Plato's text behind the sum of Damascius' individual criticisms. A particularly impressive work of exegesis is his monograph on the argument from opposites, which can compete with any

[2] See Van Riel (2000), and Van Riel, Macé, Follon (2008), CXX–CLXVIII.
[3] See Steel (1978).

modern study of the argument in terms of rigour and logical sophistication. By grounding Socrates' doctrine that the living proceed from the dead in an analysis of the relation between substances and their accidents, Damascius avoids a number of complications that stain Syrianus' account and subsumes the soul's greater durability than the body under a general law of change. In the argument from recollection, we have seen how Damascius steers away from Proclus' unnecessary *poikilia* in dealing with Simmias' objection that the soul may have come to be with its knowledge already present. The solution that Damascius gives is much closer to the spirit of Socrates' reply to Simmias than Proclus'. With the affinity argument, we get the first hint that Damascius was impressed by Cebes' weaver analogy and took it more seriously than his predecessors. Iamblichus had attempted to construe the argument as a proof of complete immortality. Proclus, while accepting Iamblichus' reading of the argument, objected that it proves only the soul's separability from its material body, while leaving open the possibility that it may perish with a finer substrate (its pneumatic envelope). Against these views, Damascius could point out not only that the Iamblichean reading of the affinity argument is unrelated to the *Phaedo* text, but also that Proclus' response to it is logically deficient. The real sense in which the argument from affinity is not a complete proof is that soul may come to perish when it is by itself, which is precisely the point Cebes will go on to make in the dialogue. In the *Phaedo*, this worry seems to be laid to rest with the final argument. But as we have seen in chapter six, Damascius seems to think that not even the final argument can rule out the possibility that the soul may, figuratively speaking, run out of steam in the course of its separate existence. The final 'monograph' on the final argument that we find in Dam.I does not address this problem specifically, although it defends the argument against a number of other problems, many of which were raised by ancient critics such as Strato. My findings on Damascius' method as a commentator on Plato thus largely confirm the results of Strömberg's and Westerink's pioneering articles on the subject.[4] Salient characteristics are Damascius' relative independence from the tradition; his readiness to refer to his own solutions to philosophical problems (e.g. to his lost *Timaeus Commentary*); and the conjunction of faithful reading of texts with careful attention to the logic of arguments.

[4] Strömberg (1946); Westerink (1971).

A.H. Armstrong once remarked that 'it appears that the Neoplatonists were in accord with the whole ancient philosophical tradition of the practice of death in that their experience and their concerns and purposes were present- rather than future-dominated'.[5] Given the emphasis in writers from Plotinus through to Olympiodorus on the importance of purification in the here and now, one may wish to concur with this judgment. Yet despite their concern with the present, later Neoplatonists such as Proclus, Olympiodorus and Damascius took Plato's descriptions of the afterlife very seriously as a guide to understanding the detailed workings of Providence which would bestow punishment for the wicked and rewards for the virtuous. In chapter seven, I have addressed the question in what sense the Neoplatonic interpreters accept the final myth in the *Phaedo* as true. For Proclus, Olympiodorus and Damascius, ideas such as the afterlife journey of souls can be accepted at face value on the strength of the common notions implanted in the soul, as well as divinely inspired mysteries. Much of the myth's scientific theory, moreover, is defensible as literal truth, although it often invites, and sometimes requires, allegorical reinterpretations.

With our guiding themes of death and immortality, we have been at the heart of the *Phaedo*'s central philosophical concerns all along. What, then, should one think of the *Commentaries on the Phaedo* as an *interpretation* of Plato? Particularly promising is the commentators' decision to define the dialogue in terms of purification, rather than forcing us to make a hard choice between more specific subjects such as death or immortality. The notion of purification covers the ethical concerns of the dialogue as well as the arguments for immortality, since the commentators consider both as two sides of the same coin. From a Neoplatonic perspective, moreover, understanding the nature of soul through the successive stages of argument we find in the *Phaedo* would itself function as a kind of purification in thought. The first three arguments for immortality are concerned with the activities of soul, and proceed through the three stages of procession, remaining and return. In the argument from opposites, the soul *qua* principle of change is shown in its involvement with the world of generation. It turns towards the forms within itself in the argument from recollection, only to revert onto the principles superior to it in the argument from affinity. The final argument transcends this focus on the soul's activities and instead concerns the essence of soul,

[5] Armstrong (1987), 35.

which is characteristic of the purest and most scientific of proofs. In the myth, too, the subject of purification looms large, though in quite a different sense: here, it concerns the particular kind of 'purificatory' justice at work in the judgment of souls.

If one can be sympathetic to the overall interpretation of the dialogue at the hands of the commentators, this does not imply that the pedagogical method underlying the late Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Phaedo* does not have its drawbacks, however. In my introduction, I have pointed out that the *Phaedo* occupies a specific place in the Neoplatonic curriculum, after the *Gorgias* but well before any more elevated dialogues such as the *Phaedrus*. Relating the *Phaedo* to other Platonic dialogues occasionally introduces artificial distinctions unlikely to represent the most natural meaning of Socrates' words; a case in point is the drawn-out confrontation between the statesman and the philosopher in pursuit of purification that we have encountered in the second chapter. Another peculiar effect of integrating the *Phaedo* into a structured curriculum is that its philosophical doctrines take on a more 'local' significance. The theory of recollection in the *Phaedo*, for example, refers only to a lower kind concerned with dianoetic forms in souls rather than the trancendent forms in the Intellect. Similarly, the philosopher's purificatory virtues do not encompass the good life in its entirety, but function as one step out of many towards perfect divinisation. Even at its most uplifting, the *Phaedo* can only give a very partial vision of reality and happiness.

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